

Stab Me in the Back (I'll Catch You From Behind)

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Stab Me in the Back (I'll Catch You From Behind)

by [Lansfics7](#)

Summary

"I am going to find Tony," the man hisses in Peter's ear, his gaze cold and cruel. "And when I do, I will kill him, slowly. What do you say to that?"

The man stops short because Peter's shoulders are shaking. He looks and sees the kid is snickering. When he lets go of Peter's hair, the teen's head slumps to his chest, but it's not out of exhaustion or defeat...it's to hide a smile.

Peter lets out a laugh, shaking his head before glancing to the sides and exclaiming, "It is so fun to mess with you!" He looks around before hooting, "Tony Stark? That's your play? You're not screwing with me, right? You actually thought that would work? Sorry guys."

Peter straightens in his chair with a sneer and a cocky wink, "Tony doesn't give a flying crap about me."

In other words.... Peter is kidnapped and his captors think they can hold Tony against him. But they don't know what's happened in the past couple months.

Not What You Envisioned

Chapter Notes

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN START YOUR ENGINESSSSSSSS

Hello lovely readers :) :) I'm back and I am not wasting any time. Thank you mouthbreather_011 for this request and it's titel! it is gonna be AWESOME! I am already sooo into writing this. There is gonna be a whole lot of protectiveness in this fic coming up it's not even funny. And I will try and go hard on the sarcasm per some requests, altho not AS hard as last fic lol that was crazy.

A lot of angst in this one so not for the faint of heart. You know me and kidnapping fics...so...strap in, it's gonna be a rough ride. We've got a little background to form first before we officially kick things off and WE WILL GET THERE because I'm sure you all will be wondering WHAT THE HECK THIS FIRST PART IS AND WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED

So I really hope you enjoy this chapter, and this fic! Thank you guys for reading and stay healthy! Hope you guys are having a great day and if not, hope this makes it a bit better <3

Continue on!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's cold- the room. Peter's used to cold, but he's definitely never been a fan of it. It's obvious they didn't care what he liked or disliked. The water that was splashed onto his face was freezing and it snaps him wide awake, sending his limbs jerking in the cuffs, Peter spluttering and gasping as he wrenches his senses into overload. He coughs and blinks, opening his eyes with a groan. The water pools in his ears until he shakes his head and mumbles, "Guys, if I wanted a shower, I would have taken one-"

He's expecting the pain that follows, feeling the world tip as he slams into the ground, his head smacking against the cold stone. Peter groans as a hand grasps his shirt and hauls him upright, the chair he's cuffed to scraping against the ground as the man rightens it. Dirt now covers the side of his arm that he fell on and Peter's gaze flicks over in annoyance.

He spits out blood and flicks the icy water from his hair, a shiver running down his back but he doesn't allow himself to flinch. Drops still fall from his lashes and wash off some of the dried blood above his eye. The blood stained shirt he's wearing, is now even a darker red since it's drenched. It's an uncomfortable feeling, especially since he know it's not like they'll be offering him a change of clothes.

The water does feel good on his cuts though, but he won't tell them that. Instead he looks through his wet bangs with a hateful gaze, breathing hard. The men circle him and Peter raises a cocky eyebrow, whistling a cowboy tune before chuckling, "We've known each other for a while guys. I thought we determined the whole westerner stand off doesn't intimidate me. It's no doubt you're the faster drawer, being that," Peter looked over his shoulder at the cuffs and grinned, "I'm a little tied up at the moment."

Being Spiderman, he could have broken normal cuffs easily, but he learned pretty early on they knew that part, which was why so many guys had been there when they jumped him, why the cuffs

were titanium, and why they had been drugging him every couple of hours.

"I still can't believe I thought you would lose that sarcasm. I guess it's here to stay."

Peter straightens, his hands curling, refusing to turn around. He hears the man come in, not just because of the small creak of the door that has been getting on his nerves, but also because he feels the vibrations in the ground with every step the man takes as he crosses the dark room. Peter shifts uncomfortably before he chuckles, "I take that as a compliment."

"Good. You should, Pete."

Peter flinches at the nickname. He puts his shoulders back and lowers his voice to a low growl, his eyes flashing, "I told you, buddy. Only one person can call me *Pete*."

"Oh yeah, I forgot. And who was that again?" the man wonders thoughtfully; Peter can hear his voice directly behind him.

He raises his chin and speaks through gritted teeth. "My father." The black boots come into his view and Peter raises his gaze, trailing up the dirty jeans and the buttoned shirt until he reaches the cold eyes. "And you don't look like you crawled out from a grave. Plus," he drawls, narrowing his eyes and shrugging with a smirk, "I don't see the resemblance. I'm a pretty good looking kid."

"Oh, my ego is devastated," the man sighs before crossing his arms and asking, "Do you know how long you've been here, Peter?"

"I'd say one week, give or take," Peter shrugs, before narrowing his eyes. "Oh, do you want an exact answer?" He bites his lip and looks up at the ceiling like he's doing math. "Six days and roughly five hours," he said firmly, looking around. "Anyone want to tell me if I'm close?"

The man's confidence falters, but then a smile grows on his face. "You never cease to impress. How did you figure that out?"

Peter shrugs, "For the first two days, I got one meal every 24 hours. Then you wanted to mess with me, so you gave me one meal for the next two days. Then the two days after that you went back to one meal, probably so I wouldn't get suspicious. Today you haven't given me jack squat, so either you're pissed at me, or you forgot. As for the hour?" Peter gave a cocky, yet innocent smirk. "I checked my watch."

Peter was patted down the minute he came in, stripped of his belongings like his wallet, phone, and more importantly, his watch. The man tilted to the side in suspicion to check Peter's wrist, which turned out to be bare. Although the check wasn't for nothing; the teen was making a gesture that made the man frown and glare at him. "Made you look," Peter snickered, before he grinned, "Any more questions?"

"Oh, I have a bunch of questions," the man smiles, following a brief stunned silence.

"Yeah," Peter nods, twisting his wrists in the cuffs. "But I can see you like to take your time." He looks up, "You haven't really asked me anything yet, or gotten to the good stuff. Just a few cuts here and there."

"Is that a challenge?" the man questions.

Peter shrugs, "No. It's an insult. You all are pansies."

"I've never had a kid ask me to torture him," the man snorts.

"Don't call me kid," Peter snaps and shakes his head. "And I'm not asking you to torture me. I'm simply wondering why spend all this effort, go all out of your way and get your best guys beat up so bad that half of them won't be able to have kids, just so you can sit around and look at me all day long. I'm asking what your point is."

"Aren't you worried no one is coming for you?" the man asks, and the concern twistedly seems genuine.

Peter winces before he manages a weak smile and shakes his head, "Worried? No. Because I *know* no one is."

"P-pardon?" the man asks slowly, unable to hide the stutter that slips out against his will.

Peter raises an eyebrow, "You sure you're not the one worried? I mean, usually people are on your tail. I fight bad guys for a living, I know a thing or two about the kidnapping stages. I take it this isn't your first rodeo, but it's probably the first one why you haven't faced any repercussions. Haven't you wondered why?"

The man straightens and looks down at Peter, "You're not here to get under my skin, Peter. Let's not forget who's in the cuffs."

"Oh, these things are unforgiving, don't worry, I won't forget they're on," Peter grins. "But I don't need to *get* under your skin, I'm already there. I am your worst nightmare, do you understand me? Because no amount of pain will make me break, and you have nothing to hold over me, to dangle in front of my face. And I can see it right now, you think you do, but you don't."

"Enlighten me then, Peter," the man shrugs, crossing his arms to remain the dominant one in the room. "Why should I be scared of you?"

"Because no one is coming for me," Peter says firmly. His voice is no longer shaking. It is calm and steady and has no doubt or waver. "I have no reason to give you anything, so unless you ask nicely, but that's not in your playbook, I don't need to give you anything. That means you're gonna be playing bluff after bluff while I hold all the cards. So try me, because I already know I won. And I'll enjoy every minute of it," Peter assures him, crossing his legs and making a face, "This ought to be a fun game, watching you try and limp to catch up. No one's coming for me. So now I don't care."

"Tony Stark," the man says slowly, narrowing his eyes. His expression looked like he put his toe into shark infested waters, just poked a bear with a stick.

"What-" Peter hisses quietly, his gaze snapping up. His throat started to close and he demanded, "What does he have to do with anything?"

The man smiles knowingly and slides his hands in his pockets, sauntering in a circle around Peter, oozing triumph, "Yeah, that's right. I hit a nerve, didn't I? Tony Stark. Like a father to you, isn't he?" Peter tenses and shifts his position in his chair. He suddenly feels a tug on his scalp as a handful of his hair is grabbed and yanked back. The low voice hisses in his ear as Peter struggles violently. "I am going to rip him apart, Peter. I will get him out of his precious compound, and I will kill him, *slowly*. And then I will make you listen to his screams. What do you say to that you-"

The man stops short because Peter's shoulders are shaking. He looks and sees the kid is snickering. He lets go of Peter's hair and the teen's head slumps to his chest.

Peter lets out a laugh, shaking his head before looking around and exclaiming, "It is so *fun* to mess

with you!" He looks around before hooting, "Tony Stark? That's your play? You're not messing with me, right? You actually thought that would work? Sorry guys. Tony doesn't give a flying *crap* about me."

"What?" the man snarls, clearly shaken by Peter's outburst and his latest statement.

Peter kicks his feet around aimlessly on the floor with a loud sigh, bouncing his leg and cocking his head, "Are you deaf? I said he doesn't give a flying crap about me- you know, maybe I need to use stronger language."

"I heard you," the man snarls, looking around at the other men who are shifting their weight from foot to foot, just as confused.

Peter nods, and then laughs again, trying to hold it in. "Now that that's cleared up, you got anything else?" He looks around, giggling, trying to keep a straight face, fueled by all the shocked expressions. He frowns in confusion, "Oh, sorry, was that not the reaction you wanted? Wait, hold on, let me try again-"

Peter cuts his grin and widens his eyes, yanking on his cuffs, swearing, "You hurt Tony and I swear to God, I'll kill you. You hear me? Don't you touch him! I'll tell you everything-" Peter grins, cutting the act and looking up. "Was that- was that better for you? Rate my acting, 1-10. The next Oscar goes to-"

The first comes faster than he was expecting, but it came nonetheless. "Talk, now," the man demanded, fisting Peter's collar in his hand to turn his head back toward him before yanking him up, practically lifting him off the seat.

Peter sighs in discomfort and looks the man dead in the eyes. "You've proven your strength tough guy. Now let go of my shirt," he says calmly. "Or I won't explain."

The man has no choice. He uncurls his fingers and Peter slumps back down, taking a deep breath before sighing and teetering back on the two legs of the chair. "First off, let me get one thing straight. You guys call yourself spies? Or HYDRA or whatever, right? Yes? No? You're spies, but your one main play has just failed you. Therapy session later to talk about how devastating this must be."

Then Peter tosses his head towards the men surrounding them who have been silent for his entire time in this hellhole. He whispers, "I'm starting to wonder if those guys actually talk or if their job is to stand there and look like they want to kill you."

No answer, just the man fuming in front of him. "Tough crowd," Peter whistles before he frowns, shaking his head. "You guys definitely weren't loved as kids. Were you...dropped as a baby? Or at any point in your early childhood-"

"ENOUGH!" the man yells, slamming his fists down on the top of Peter's chair over his shoulders. He hisses through gritted teeth, "Explain."

"Fine, fine, a promise is a promise," Peter sighs, repositioning himself on the chair. He cocks his head, speaking slowly, "I hate to be the one to break this to you, but Tony and I are done. We haven't talked in...a very, very long time."

The man is set back on his heels, defeated but trying not to show it. He narrows his eyes at Peter and looks around at other people's expressions, as if considering the fact that Peter is lying.

Peter makes a face, "Aw, come on. You guys don't believe me, I can tell. But think about it. He's

not looking for me, did that ever occur to you? The only logical explanation to why, is because we're not the super tight, batman and robin duo we once were. Whatever you want to call it, it happened. Falling out, huge fight, blah, blah, blah. Main kicker is that we're on a no contact, 'I don't want anything to do with you' policy for....ever. I'm nothing to him and vice versa. So...yeah. Sorry to burst your cute little HYDRA bubbles."

There's silence in the room and Peter snorts, looking around. He wiggles his eyebrows and sinks into the chair with a cocky smirk. "This is definitely not how you envisioned this would go, is it?"

3 Months Earlier

"I hate you."

"No you don't Pete. Please, don't say that. It breaks my heart," Tony drawls, rolling his eyes.

"I literally hate you."

"I'm just *saying*," Tony calls gleefully. "MJ is gonna miss you if you're not there before the first bell!" he taunts.

"I do not. Have a crush. On MJ," Peter huffs as he storms around behind him. Tony stays silent, a smile growing on his face as he waits for Peter's exasperated sigh and the teenager shouts, "Oh, I know you're smirking over there and you wanna know what?"

"What?" Tony grins, buttoning the cuff to his suit.

"I hate you."

"As you've previously mentioned," Tony sniffs with a shrug.

"Oh, have I?"

"Multiple times, yes. I'm not deaf."

"Contrary to popular opinion."

"Excuse me?"

"Proving my point."

"That's not what I-" Tony makes a face and cleans his sunglasses on his shirt. "For that comment, I think I'll send MJ a text. How about...sorry, Peter's being a brat and is gonna be late to first period. By the way, he has a huge massive crush on you."

"You don't have her number," Peter snorts.

"No, but you had me hold your phone," Tony reminds him, turning on Peter's iPhone and swiping the screen with a smile on his face.

"You don't know my password," Peter says triumphantly.

Tony enters his password in less than a second and smirks, coughing out a laugh, "Nice home screen."

There's silence, before Peter's grumble is audible. "Like I said, I hate you."

"Aw, you don't mean that," Tony chuckles, scratching an itch on his shin and checking his watch again. He puts away Peter's phone, contempt with the amount of embarrassment he's put him through.

"I do. I hate you so much right now," Peter repeats in exasperation, his voice fading as he moves around the room. "And how do you know my password?"

"Because." Tony grins wider, leaning against the other side of the wall until he hears a loud scrape. Peter's obviously moving furniture and Tony groans, "Hey, can you not break apart my living room?"

"Could you at least help me find my backpack, then?" Peter yells.

"Maybe if you kept track of your stuff you wouldn't be asking me all the time," Tony says, sticking his head into the living room and visibly tapping his watch. "Three minutes late Pete, come on."

"Oh shut up. It's not like you're ever early," Peter grumbles, searching under the pillow on the couch and then the actual cushion itself.

"I don't think it would be under there," Tony drawls, watching the comedy skit unfold before him as he crosses his arms and leans against the wall.

"HAH!" Peter grins triumphantly, grabbing something from under the couch. Before Tony is about to marvel at how his backpack gets down there, he realizes that's not what Peter found. The teen tugs a 50 dollar bill out instead and wiggles his eyebrows, slipping it into his pocket.

"Hey, that's mine," Tony narrows his eyes.

Peter winces and shakes his head, "Finder's keepers. Mine now. You should really keep track of your stuff."

He lets out a laugh as he runs by and Tony flicks him in the back of the head, "Yeah, touche, brat!"

"Your words," Peter smiles over his shoulder. Tony follows him into his room and Peter sighs after another minute of searching, his hands flapping against his sides in defeat. He puts a hand against his head and shrugs, "Welp, I guess I'm going to school without a backpack."

Tony rubs his chin, "Hey, check behind the chair in the kitchen table."

"It would not be there," Peter snorts in disbelief.

"I bet you that fifty that it is," Tony wiggles his eyebrows.

"Deal," Peter sneers.

"Six minutes late," Tony taps his watch and Peter sprints out of his room and down the hall, Tony running to keep up as they race down the steps. Peter nearly crashes into the kitchen wall as he lunges past the island, skidding across the tile to a stop at the circular table where he stares in disbelief. The backpack is leaning against the chair leg. He suddenly remembers leaving it there and his mouth opens to sprout some sarcastic retort, but Tony fills the dead air first.

"I guess I know you pretty well," the man winks, finally caught up to him. He pats Peter on the shoulder and holds out his hand, "I'll take my fifty."

"Yeah, yeah, I guess you do," Peter reluctantly slaps the bill down on his open palm and Tony ruffles his hair before grabbing his backpack for him and sticking the money inside with a wink.

"Eight minutes now, get your butt in the car," Tony motions his head over his shoulder and Peter turns on his heel before reaching for the fresh mug of hot coffee that was left to cool by one of the Avengers at some point. "Not a chance, Parker!" Tony barks.

Peter curses and dodges Tony's swipe before racing for the steps that lead to the garage, "I should be able to drink coffee!"

"You don't sleep as it is," Tony shoots back, sliding down the rail to get ahead of Peter. He winks behind him at the kid taking three stairs at a time, "Keep up."

"You wanna go there?" Peter raises an eyebrow and hops over the railing, shooting a web and lowering himself to the ground level. He looks up at Tony once he reaches the bottom, letting go of the web which dissolves. He salutes him cockily, "Keep up, old man!"

"Son of-" Tony curses at him before dropping his keys down the center of the stairs. "Start the car! If you sit in the driver's seat, I'll kill you!" He runs down the remaining steps and races across the parking garage, yanking open the drivers door and tosses the backpack into Peter's lap. He reaches, putting on his seat belt and putting his arm behind the the kid's seat, shoving the stick in reverse. "Seat belt," he automatically says.

"You're kidding?" Peter demands with wide eyes, stabbing his finger towards the clock. "We're late! Just drive!"

"Well we're not gonna get there if you go flying through the windshield," Tony snaps.

"Well then how about you don't drive like a maniac for once?" Peter shoots back.

"Oh I'm sorry, four year old, are you seriously arguing about putting a strip of polyester over your chest?" Tony draws.

"If it's just a strip of polyester, why is it so important?" Peter argues. "Besides, I'm Spiderman."

Tony turns to look at him, "And is there a little fine print section that says 'can survive car crash without seat belt on'? Cause I didn't know you had a manual."

"You've got to be-"

"Eleven minutes!" Tony shouts.

"FINE!" Peter yanks the seatbelt over his chest. "DRIVE."

"Don't tell me what to do," Tony says, slamming down on the gas and spinning the wheel before shoving the stick into drive and flicking down his sunglasses that were on the top of his head.

Peter presses his palm against the side of the car for support and his feet against the dash as they skid out of the parking garage. Tony shoves his foot on the gas, speeding down the road to the gate. Once they get on a straighter road, Peter reaches and yanks his phone out of Tony's pocket to check it. "You've got to get me to school, which usually takes 20 minutes, in 9. I don't think that's possible."

"Never tell me the odds," Tony grins.

"We watched star wars two nights ago, Tony," Peter sighs. "You've made over 160 references since then."

"Yeah, and yet," Tony looks over and grins, "I'm still not as annoying as you."

Peter points at the road, "Eyes ahead Han Solo. Just because I put on my seat belt, that doesn't mean you can crash." He reaches for the wheel but Tony smacks his hands away.

"Hands off. I find your lack of faith disturbing," Tony counters with a wide grin, earning a hit in the shoulder from Peter who let's out a loud groan. Tony snickers and peers down at his shoulder, "Watch the suit, I've got to look presentable...I've got a conference I'm going to. I'm late too, you know. Thanks to you."

Peter rolls his eyes, "And you seem devastated."

"I'm hiding it well," Tony sniffs.

About eight and a half minutes later, Tony spins the wheel hard around the corner, nearly missing the curb before he slams his foot on the break at the front of Peter's school. The kid grabs his backpack and grins, "Well we didn't die, so that's a start!"

"It's cause you wore your seat belt," Tony grins, reaching to ruffle his hair.

Peter shoves him off and scoffs, "Oh, shut up." Then he smiles, "Thanks, Tony."

"Right on time too," Tony looks at his watch and grins. "Told you so."

"Yeah, let me know when all those traffic cam tickets come in," Peter snorts as he opens the door and slips out, backpack in tow.

"Ok, you know what, I ran one red and it was like one second over!" Tony protests. Peter gives him a raised eyebrow and he sighs, admitting, "Ok, two. It wouldn't have happened if my kid could get himself out the door on time."

Peter shuts the door and pats the inside of the car through the open window, "Thanks, Tony."

"Hey Pete," he calls after him and the kid stops in his tracks, looking over his shoulder. "Free period?" Tony wonders.

Peter grins and nods, hefting his backpack onto his shoulder. "Free period."

"Ok, see you then. Now go get your girl," Tony waves him off with a smile on his face, a similar one on Peter's.

"Peter, I swear to God if you don't get out of there in the next 10 seconds, I will drag you out myself!" Tony yells, swerving the green goblin's swipe and blasting him in the back to keep their new villain preoccupied.

"*Keep your suit on, I'm almost out,*" Peter grumbles back and a second later he sees his red and blue suit emerge from the side door, kicking it off it's hinges. Peter has his arm around a mother and he's holding the two year old in his arms. Tony breathes a sigh of relief the kid found them and can't help but feel proud as the teen hands the child back to her mom and waves them for the police

line. Peter looks up and crosses his arms over one another, shooting a web to fling himself on the top of the nearest streetlight. *"Well this is one of the more eventful bonding experiences we've had."*

"Yeah, I'm never letting you join me on your free periods again," Tony grumbles.

"You sure about that? Watch your six Tony," Peter snaps. Tony instinctively ducks at Peter's warning and the Goblin skims his head, looping back around. Tony knows it's coming, and a second later he hears it: *"How about you pay attention instead of worrying about me, huh?"*

"It's my job kid, get over it," Tony snaps back. "It's the reason I'm here: to make sure you don't get hurt."

"Really? I thought we were actually hanging out," Peter shouted sarcastically.

"Well that too," Tony shrugs, swerving to the right the next time the Goblin made a pass.

"Although I didn't count on Greenie stopping by today."

"Yeah, who even is this guy? Karen can't get anything on him!"

"New villain," Tony yelled, giving Peter an opening to land a punch before he dove down, avoiding a bomb that exploded over his head. "Not like he's on instagram."

"No need to get pissy," Peter grumbled and Tony grinned before the teen spoke again, in a low growl. *"And he's not gonna be around for long."* Peter lunged off the building, webbing one of the engines on the glider as he swung by.

"Got that right," Tony swore, before blasting the glider in the same engine Peter had just webbed up. It bursts into flames and goes spinning away. Of course that's when Peter decides to take a lunge, webbing the nearest tall building and swinging into the Goblin. He lets go, timing it perfectly, landing on the board as well.

"You freaking idiot!" Tony yells through coms.

"Insult me later!" Peter ducks a swipe and shoves his knee into the Goblin's crotch before he's shoved in the chest in retaliation. Peter tilts backward, his arms windmilling in his attempts to stay upright. He webs the Goblin's chest and they both tip forward. Peter snarls and gets one good punch in the face in as the glider straightens, giving Peter his balance back. He's holding his own, Tony will admit, at least until the Goblin slams his helmet into Peter's forehead. Then the teen gets kneed in the stomach so hard Peter doubles over, stumbling on whatever footing he has left. The kid brings his arm up and groggily webs the Goblin's right hand to his side.

"Pete, get out of there," Tony warns dangerously, his arm pointed at the glider which is being flung all over the place, dangerously missing walls and doing loops. It's a wonder Peter is staying on, but because he is, Tony knows he can't take the shot.

"No, I'm enjoying this," Peter groans as he attempts to web his left but misses, the armored hand clasp around his throat and starting to clench. Peter chokes, his legs scrambling as he's raised up off his feet. Peter gasps, trying to pry the fingers apart around his neck as he attempts to break the hold. Just then the Goblin slides a knife through the webs trapping his hand and punches Peter across the face. Peter's feet slip and the Goblin brings back the knife, ready to bring it down into the kid's chest.

"Darn it kid. Not on my watch," Tony curses and takes his shot. It hits the Goblin in the back and he drops both the knife and Peter with a loud howl that Tony almost recognizes. But the man is not his focus. Tony's vision tunnels as Peter's lenses close and he slips from his enemy's grasp,

dropping off of the glider and falling into open air. Shouting another curse, Tony dives and snatches him before he can hit the ground, holding him to his chest.

"You've always got my back," Peter mumbles.

"Don't get all sappy on me Parker," Tony demands, dodging a bomb that was lofted in their direction before landing on the roof of the nearest building. Tony gently lays Peter down, firing a beam behind him to keep the Goblin at bay. "Hey, hey, hey, Pete, you good?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," Peter coughs, gripping Tony's arm with one hand, holding his head with the other.

"Stay there," Tony demands, pointing at him in anger as he gets to his feet and hovers, turning towards the Goblin.

"Fat chance," Peter grumbles, staggering to his feet a little ways behind him, clutching his ribs.

Tony curses at him before firing up his boosters as batting away a pumpkin bomb that explodes 50 feet in the air. He jumps off the building before spiraling towards the Goblin and slamming into him full force. He knocks him off the glider and they crash through the wall of the burning building, going tumbling. Tony scrapes the ground as he comes to a stop on one knee, looking up, his eyes glowing. He stands and puts out a palm, scanning.

FRIDAY shows movement to his left and Tony instinctively ducks as the Goblin makes a lunge with a very sharp looking knife. The man is on feet, his glider probably totaled somewhere. Tony twists and breaks the knife out of his armor, throwing it aside before blasting him in the chest.

He hears the man groan as he's tossed forward but he soon spins, thrusting his palm forward into Tony's arc reactor, a small machine pulsing. Tony sees the display flicker and FRIDAY's garbled voice meets his ear, *"Break the-link- sucking-power-2 minutes-shut down-"*

He grabs the Goblin by the head and slams him into his knee before pressing both palms against the arm against his chest. His beam slowly melts through the armor and he's forced to stare his enemy in his haunting red lenses.

"I don't want to kill you Tony Stark," the Goblin says slowly says lowly.

Tony winces, "Good to know. That makes one of us, Greenie." He kicks the Goblin's feet out from under him and slams his fist down on his arm, breaking the hold and shattering the armor. Tony spins and kicks him in the chest, watching as he flies backward and hits the far wall, slumped, but still breathing.

"Trying to get back power!" FRIDAY says urgently as Tony approaches his enemy.

"You...and I...are not so different," the Goblin rasps as he attempts to push himself up against the wall, his armor cracked and covered in dust. Smoke rising around him, flames licking at the walls and floor.

"Nice try buddy, but I'm not a murderer," Tony hisses, storming forward.

"Well, to each his own. I chose my path, you chose the way of the hero," the man responds, sending a pumpkin bomb spinning at him with a flick of his wrist. Tony deflects it and it blows up the room next over as he climbs over the broken and burning rubble to get to his enemy.

"Save the monologue," Tony demands, deflecting another bomb.

"They found you amusing for a while, the people of this city. Of the world. But the one thing they love more than a hero is to see a hero fail, fall, die trying," the Goblin says happily, speaking faster while he still can, sending a bomb to Tony's feet which he crushes beneath his boot, leaving a hole in the burning floor. Tony yanks his foot out between the broken boards and raises his murderous gaze. The Goblin cocks his head, recognizing the anger's origin, "In spite of everything you've done for them, eventually, they will hate you. They hate you right now. So why bother?"

"Because it's right. And because I have this thing called a soul," Tony snaps.

"But can you sleep at night?" the Goblin asks, making Tony stumble just slightly at the weight behind that message.

"Does it matter?" Tony snaps, reaching him and leveling his blaster which starts to fire up. "You'll be dead soon. You can't hurt anyone anymore."

The Goblin snickers, then laughs loudly, ripping off his mask before letting it fall to the side where it lands in the fire, flames rising between the eyes. Tony falters as he looks at the man behind the mask. His face is bloody and bruised, hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, but Tony still knows him from countless meetings, from the magazines, from the dirty looks they would give each other as competitors across the room of whatever convention they saw each other at.

"Osborn?" he whispers. For a second, Tony considers lowering his arm but he keeps it up. With a curse he shakes his head, his helmet receding to his neck so he can look the man in the eyes. Tony takes a minute to adjust to the smoke before he asks, "Why?" Tony shakes his head and demands again, "At least- at least tell me why."

Osborn's eyes go wide, and Tony can't see anything worth saving past them. A grin spreads across the man's face, blood dripping down his chin, "That is a good question, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is," Tony snaps. "So answer it. Now."

"Because I'm immortal," Norman shrugs with a happy laugh. Blood stains his teeth as he smiles, "If you kill me, Tony, will it really matter? There will always be others. It's a never ending fight that you just can't win. You will continue to cause the deaths of countless innocents in selfish battle again and again and again until you're dead! And you will die Tony, that day will come," he said sadly.

"I may look good for my age, but I've still got a while," Tony sneers in retaliation.

"Everyone dies Tony. Heroes die. Villains die. But there will always be evil," Osborn spits, his breathing starting to get lathered.

"Maybe," Tony nods with a shrug. "But I can live with that. I'll be there to stop it."

"At what cost? Your little spiderling has seven crushed ribs right about now, wherever he is. It's probably getting hard for him to breathe," the Goblin laughed gleefully. "And he sounded no more than sixteen? He's already getting hurt because of you, Tony, just like everyone has, or will in the near future. So," the Goblin rasps, "by all means, continue this life if you want to, but just know you are signing that kid's death warrant. Along with anyone else you care about."

"Bye Norman," Tony says firmly, firing up a blast, for the sole reason that Norman was pushing all the right buttons.

The Goblin's lips curl into a smile and he hears a small click as the man hits a button on his wrist and gives him a creepy wave, "Bye Tony."

"Sir-behind- you-" FRIDAY warns, his display still glitching.

"NO!"

Tony spins and sees the glider, sharp knives glistening on the ends, heading straight for his chest. But as soon as he realizes that the shout didn't come from his mouth or Osborns', a flash of red and blue sidesteps in front of him and Tony jumps in shock. There's a nauseating *shink* and Tony looks down at Peter who is gripping the edge of the glider with both hands, keeping it from hitting its original target. Tony breathes a sigh of relief and let's out a small laugh, putting his hand on the kid's shoulder, "Well that was a close call, kid-"

That's when he hears a gurgle. Peter's hands let go of the glider, dropping limply to the side. His knees buckle and he falls backward into Tony who catches him in shock, both of them crying out in unison as the two blades of the glider, dripping with the teen's blood, slide out of Peter's stomach as he collapses into Tony's arms.

"Crap, crap, hey, Pete, you hear me?" Tony demanded in a panic, easing him down with his head in his lap. Tony rips off his mask, letting it fall in disbelief and shock before cupping the sides of the kid's face, thumb brushing his cheekbone. Peter's hair bounces even though it's sweaty, and he looks up at him with wide eyes, his mouth full of blood.

"Oh God- Peter...hey, stay with me. You're gonna be ok," Tony says firmly, already moving to look at the cut, gripping Peter's hand in his. "Just stay with me. I've got you, you're gonna be just fine," Tony promises, brushing hair out of the teen's face as the kid jerks in his grasp in attempts to breathe.

"FRIDAY, have med bay prepped, ok?" Tony says, trying to keep his voice from shaking, before smiling at Peter. "I've gotta lift you up kiddo, ok? Easy, easy," he whispers. "I have to see if they went all the way through and then we gotta go, ok? This is gonna hurt, but you trust me, right?"

Peter tries to talk but all he does is cough up blood and tears build up in Peter's eyes as the kid tries to breath faster, his lungs and throat closing as he chokes on his own blood. Tony's heart his clenched with a cold fist and he desperately tries to calm him down, hearing his name being attempted with every gasp Peter gulps down.

"Tny- Tony- ny-"

"I'm here, I'm right here," Tony assures him, ruffling his hair gently. "I'm lifting you. Stay with me, Pete, come on." He gently cups the back of the kid's neck and raises Peter into a sitting position with a supportive hand on his back, avoiding the stab wounds. The teen whimpers only because he can't scream, his hands curling into fists, his eyes starting to roll into the back of his head as he goes heavy against Tony's hand holding him up. His head slumps forward to his chest as Tony supports his shoulders.

"Easy, Pete, easy," Tony gently claps a hand to his cheek to keep him awake, cursing as he sees the double stab wounds went all the way through. He grows nauseous at the massive pool of blood that just keeps spilling out as presses his arm against the wounds on Peter's back, "FRIDAY make a seal."

"Is- it- bad-" Peter makes out somehow in a weak voice, more blood dripping down the front of his suit at his attempt to speak.

He glances at his pale face, eyes that are starting to go out of focus, and lips that are beginning to lose color. Then he smiles and shakes his head, "No kid, it's not even that bad, it's not bad at all.

You're gonna be fine. Good as new in a couple days."

"You promise?" Peter chokes, blood dropping from his lips, his eyes starting to close.

Tony curses and forces a smile, his hand curling around the Spiderman mask he had dropped on the ground. "I promise," he lies, giving Peter another comforting smile. Then he grabs his hand, making Peter open his eyes and he squeezes it tightly, "You feel that? You feel me? Peter, can you-"

Peter squeezes his hand back and croaks, "Yeah."

"Ok," Tony breathes a sigh of relief and positions Peter's palm over the stab wound, applying minimal pressure to it. The kid winces and fights him and Tony feels tears in his eyes. "Pete, Pete, stop, please, you have to." A small sound escapes Peter's lips, tears sliding down his face as Tony's shaking hand keeps his palm in place to try and stop the bleeding. "Don't move it, ok? Put your hands there and don't take them off, got it? You understand me, kid?"

"It hurts," Peter makes out, licking his lips and making a face of disgust at the taste of his own blood, but he does what Tony says and gingerly lets his hand rest in the pool of blood on his stomach, slightly quivering.

"I know it hurts, I know, I'm sorry," Tony curses, his voice cracking with sympathy. He cups Peter's cheek to get him to focus, the kid going limp against his hand. "Hey, right here. Hi. There we go, Underoos. I'm gonna lift you up, ok?" Peter doesn't acknowledge him and Tony slips a hand under both of his legs, pulling him towards his chest before he slowly stands with the teen in his arms. The kid flinches before starting to cough and choke, which causes even more pain. Peter cries out, digging his head into Tony's shoulder, eyes squeezed shut. Tony speaks firmly, panic and fear coating his voice, "Easy, easy, I know. Come on, bud. Press your hands against your side, Pete. One on either side- there you go, kiddo."

"I don't- want to- die-" Peter cries out quietly, suddenly pressing his hands tighter to his chest, blood spilling over his palms as he stares at Tony blankly, eyes dangerously close to losing their life.

"You're not going to," Tony immediately responds, holding him tighter to his chest. "You're gonna be fine. Just hang in there, kid, I've got you."

"Death warrant," Goblin rasps behind him. Tony had forgotten. He turns around with Peter in his arms and hisses, "Go to hell." Then his helmet comes down over his face and he blasts off, shouting, "FRIDAY, make sure he's dead."

"Already sending in a suit."

"Tell- May-" Peter coughs, his face screwing up in pain.

"Parker," Tony snaps as he shoots across the sky. "You listen to me, kid. You're not dying on me so shut up. I'm not losing you, okay? Just- just hang in there and don't close your eyes Pete, you hear me? Eyes on me. Do you understand me, kid?" Tony demands, harsher than he wanted to, but he needed Peter awake.

"Kay-" Peter slurs, his breathing getting raspier as blood fills his lungs.

"That's my boy," Tony says firmly, rubbing a thumb over Peter's forehead, his sweaty hair plastered to his face. Tony feels physical pain while looking at the pure exhaustion in the teen's fading eyes, the blood on his lips, the way his nose is scrunched up, his Adam's apple bobbing as

he tries to breathe. Tony gulps down a sob and his voice cracks. "FRIDAY?"

"Med bay cleared. Closest entrance, west. Level 2."

"I'm almost there, hang on Pete," Tony whispers as the boy's hand slides off of his chest, blood spilling across the suit, soaking the fabric even more. Peter's eyes roll into the back of his head with a whimper and Tony's name on his lips. Tony keeps his eyes ahead as he shoots toward the compound, his heart shattering as Peter's head slumps against the armor.

"I don't care what you tell me Pepper, that kid is in there bleeding out and I am out here, perfectly fine. Because of him. Because he jumped in front of me and took the hit. It was my fault," Tony seethed, jamming his finger in the direction of the bed bay. "A sophomore in highschool- come on Pete! Why'd you have to-"

"It wasn't your-"

In a fit of rage Tony pushes over the table nearest to him and it falls with a loud clatter, the pot on the top of it shattering, dirt spreading across the waiting room floor. Tony presses a fist to his mouth, his entire body shaking before he runs his hands through his hair, curling his fingers into fists so hard he swears he's going to draw blood. "If someone...tells me...that it wasn't my fault..." he holds up a trembling finger, "one more friggin time-"

"Tony, you would have done the same for him," Pepper snapped firmly to get his attention.

Tony spins, nodding violently. He laughs without humor and spreads his arms, "I know I would. I know. That's the problem with us," he says quietly, stabbing a finger into his chest with a wince before pointing at the lab. "With me and Peter. We are *messed up*, Pepp. We are screwed. The minute we met we were screwed."

"I don't...understand. What's the problem?" Pepper demands.

"The problem is that he's 16 and ready to risk his life for me. To frickin die for me," Tony says, his breathing starting to speed up. He runs his hands through his hair. "No. I'm not okay with that."

Pepper purses her lips, putting her hand on his shoulder. "You know how much you mean to him."

Tony nods, rubbing his chin, "I know. And I'm gonna get him killed one day. If it's not today, it will happen again, because the kid won't learn his lesson and he won't listen to me. He never does. That's kind of our relationship. I'm gonna get him killed because that's what I do- I get people killed, Pepper."

"Don't say that," Pepper whispers.

Tears come to Tony's eyes and he forces a fake smile to try and blink them away, biting the inside of his cheek and swallowing the lump in his throat, "We're not stronger together, Pepp. I've been trying to keep him safe this entire time and I failed. I failed him. Don't- don't get me wrong, I would die for him, I would. In a second! And I know he would die for me, heck, he is dying for me, right now, and I- I hate that, Pepper! I hate it!"

Pepper sighs, "Tony-"

"The problem is, *people know that*, Pepp! Villians! Monsters! Evil people *know* that we would do anything for each other and they're using it against us. I am tired of him having a target on his back

because of me," Tony swears, gritting his teeth. He takes a shaky breath and hisses, "And more than that, I am tired of him jumping in front of bullets to save me! Because I don't deserve to be saved! That kid idolizes me and I have no idea why!" Tony yells.

"Tones," Pepper counters quietly, looking at him in pain and sympathy. He knows what she's going to say, so she doesn't say it. They have an understanding in a look; they've had that talk many times before.

He presses a hand to his head until it hurts, "I can't lose him, Pepp. I can't. And I feel like I am, but the problem is, I'm the reason. We're the reason. He would have been so much safer if I had never recruited him to come to Germany. He'd still flying around in a onesie."

"Yeah, in sweatpants and goggles, Tony," Pepper spluttered, her eyes wide. "You gave him a functioning suit that allowed him to make the best of his abilities. You saved his life!"

"Yeah, and then I signed his death warrant. He was a kid, stopping car crashes and bike thieves-"

"He wanted more, Tony!" Pepper exclaimed. "You know he did!"

"Yeah, but he wouldn't have gotten to this point if it wasn't for me. Now he's fighting winged villians who throw planes on top of him, and a hover-boarding lunatic-" Tony flings his hand out in exaggeration.

"And that's bad, why?" Pepper asks, putting her hands on her hips.

"A common every day mugging doesn't get you impaled twice through the stomach by a glider, Pepper," Tony hissed angrily.

"I'm not saying it does," she snaps back. "But point is, you taught Peter how to protect himself. You gave him the opportunity to become a hero. He understands the risks-"

"You really think he does?" Tony snorts and Pepper falters, allowing him to continue. "He's naive. Of course he is! That's not a bad thing! He should be innocent, he shouldn't be worrying about this crap! He's a 16 year old kid from Queens, a sophomore in high school, he thinks everything is like Coney Island, or a field trip. It could be me or the end of the world and I know which one he'd pick because I would do the same."

"Because you're like a father to him!" Pepper says in exasperation before her glare sharpens and she points at him. "Tony, you may have balls when it comes to a lot of things, but you have yet to be a tough guy when it comes to telling Peter flat out that he is like a son to you," she hisses. "Wanting to love and protect someone is not a crime. So stop treating it like one."

"I know it's not, Pepper," Tony says weakly. "But it's going to kill us." Tears come to his eyes and Tony shakes his head, making up his mind. "And I don't care if he hates me, or if it's the worst thing to do, because I know one thing, and one thing only. That he wakes up in cold sweats and has panic attacks from some of his fights, which is something only someone like me should deal with...not the kid. And now, he's gonna wake up screaming because he's gonna see two blades sink into his body." Tony shoves a hand through his hair and then runs it over his face.

"All I know," he says breathlessly, his lungs aching with stress and anger. "Is without me in the picture, he will be safer."

Pepper's eyes widen and she grabs his shoulder, "Tony...whatever you're thinking of doing-"

"I have to," Tony said quietly, turning towards her and lacing her hand in his. His voice comes out

quieter than he was expecting, "Pepper, he deserves to be a kid. I can't have him sacrificing himself for me, or- or, dying on my watch, and I most definitely won't let him risk his life for me anymore. If removing myself from his life keeps him safe, that's exactly what I'm gonna do."

"Do you think Peter will want that?" Pepper demands.

Tony looks down, "No. But that's exactly why I have to do it."

There's silence between the two of them and Tony can hear the ringing in his ears and the pounding of his heart as Pepper attempts to persuade him with some looks that have an abundance of words.

"At least say goodbye to him after his surgery. You owe him that," Pepper says weakly before she shakes her head and cups his cheek, staring into his eyes with one last urge to drop this new plan of his. After realizing she can't convince him, she lets her hand fall and gives him a sympathetic and sad smile before walking down the hall.

Legs threatening to give out underneath him, Tony collapses into the chair and pulls out his buzzing cell, texts from the other Avengers blowing up his phone. Most are at an international conference.

Steve: *Is Peter ok?? What happened?*

Rhodey : *Give us the word and we will hop on a flight and get back Tones.*

Sam: *How bad?*

Bucky: *Status?*

Nat: *Update me. Now.*

Clint: *How's the kid?*

Vision: *Is he alright?*

Wanda: *Can we do anything to help?*

Tony shoots a text to Pepper somehow, it's a wonder he even got through it because of how bad his hands were shaking. She responds quickly, saying she will take care of the questions from the team. He tosses his phone to the side and grips the chair; he can barely see, his vision is blurring. Tony sinks lower in the seat and leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees and rubbing his hands in his hair, his knees bouncing anxiously. His breath hitched in his throat, lungs burning, Tony puts his head in his hands, trying to take deep breaths as he closes his eyes, blocking the tears.

It's about two hours later when Bruce comes to get him. He pats Tony's shoulder and he looks up, marks on his forehead from where he rested his palms for the majority of the waiting times.

"You look awful," Bruce comments.

He felt awful. Usually Tony would fake it, jump right up and act like he was holding himself together, but he couldn't right now. He was drained, worry weighing on his shoulders. He could only manage a scoff, "Thanks, bud."

Bruce looks him over once and Tony lets his pissed off side give him adrenaline for a split second as he gives Bruce a glance that clearly says, *diagnose me 'Bones', and I'll kill you.* Banner takes the

warning before he motions over his shoulder with a nod of his head, "Peter's still sedated. The surgery went well, we stopped the internal bleeding and patched him up as best we could. We couldn't risk stitches because well..."

Tony nodded. A couple months ago Peter had taken a bullet. When they stitched it up, his skin as healed over it, and they had to dig back in to pry out each piece one by one.

"We bandaged him up pretty tight. We only lost him once on the table. Believe it or not, that's really good," Bruce says weakly. Tony feels like he's gonna throw up and his friend put a steady hand on his arm. "He's ok, Tones. He'll wake up in 20 minutes or so. His super healing is what saved him- otherwise he would have been DOA. Recovery time is all up to him now."

"Thanks Bruce," Tony smiles weakly as he stands, Bruce clasping his arm for support.

Bruce nods, patting him on the back before steadying him, "Sure buddy. He's gonna be ok, Tony. He'll pull through. He always does."

Tony looks down at his feet and nods with a small smile, "Yeah, I know he will. Thanks again." Bruce nods and walks down the hall, his footsteps fading as he disappears around the corner. Tony shoves his hands in his pockets and begins walking down the hallway, pushing open the door to the med lab at the far end.

Tony sees the closed door on the right side of the hall and makes his way over to it, grasping the handle and slowly turning it with shaking hands. He walks in and his heart stops. He's never seen the kid so vulnerable.

Peter's perfectly still, his head slumped to the side, his curls still matted with a little blood, the rest of it cleared, but Peter's never looked worse in Tony's eyes. There's a tube in his nose and mouth and an IV is by his bed, a heart monitor beeping steadily. Tony has never been so grateful to hear that high pitched sound in his life.

Tony looks around and pulls a chair to his side, hesitantly putting a hand on Peter's knee atop the blankets. He waits tensely, as if expecting a reaction, but of course he won't get one. He manages a smile, "Hey, kid."

Tony moves his other hand to wipe his eyes as subtly as possible. He tightens his hold on Peter's knee and squeezes it, "Just make it out of this one, ok? You've got to keep fighting. If you can hear me...give me all you got, kiddo. You'll be back on your feet in no time, stopping crime, but this time around, we won't."

Why is he even explaining himself? He knew what he was doing was going to hurt the kid, there was no doubt about that, but as much as it pained Tony to know that, he stood by the fact that he would rather have the teen pissed then having to stand at the funeral.

"Look...I know I can't ask you to do this, but I'm going to anyway. D-don't call," Tony says weakly, "don't come to the compound- stick to the ground, kid. Like before you met me," he smiles weakly, messing with the edge of the blanket with his thumb. "When the worst thing you faced were some idiots trying to mug a thirty two year old in a back alley."

He smiles again, to hide the pain. "No-no aliens, no supervillians, no getting stabbed with gliders because you're too stubborn to-" Tony curses and puts his head down clasping both hands around Peter's knee. "We're gonna be the death of each other, kid. I've known it for a while and I pushed it away because...well, because you meant so much to me. But now...with you...you almost died, Peter. And I can't let that happen again. I can't watch you get hurt, knowing it was my fault,

because I've done that too many times."

He takes a deep breath and blinks again, harshly, biting the inside of his cheek, not wanting to say the words, even though he knows he has to. "So, I uh- I think it's time we...lose contact for a while, go our own ways," he says quietly. "Our separate ways. Because we're not...we're not stronger together Pete."

"The bad guys who want me dead, they want you dead too. And with us being so ready to throw ourselves in front of freaking gliders..." he shoots Peter a look and manages a smile, "you sneaky bastard..." Tony ducks his head down to his chest to compose himself, before rubbing a hand over his mouth and mumbling, "I think the best thing for us to do is stop giving them a reason to use us against each other."

Tony runs a hand roughly through his hair and shakes his head, "You're gonna hate me. But as long as you're safe," he chokes on a laugh. "I don't- I don't really care." He looks at Peter and smirks slightly, "Yeah, take that, Parker." Tony swallows the lump in his throat but it won't go away. His stomach is churning but whenever he considers not going through with what he had in mind, he hears the gurgle Peter lets out and sees those knives slide out of his stomach, covered in the kid's blood.

Tony's mind is made up at the vision of Peter getting hurt and he looks up with tears in his eyes. "Who am I kidding? Kid, this is gonna tear me apart. More than you know. But I'm doing this because I love you Pete. Because you're the closest thing I have to a son and- and-" Tony's voice drops. "I'm sorry I was too afraid of losing you that I never got to tell you that."

He blinks and looks up, speaking firmly, forcing his voice to steady, "Just know this isn't your fault. You did absolute nothing wrong, you just did everything right, and I- I screwed it up." Tony looks around and wipes his eyes again, standing and patting Peter's knee. "I'm sorry, Pete. I'm so sorry. But you are not getting hurt for me. Not ever again."

Tony pushes the chair back in and lifts Peter's phone on the bedside table before setting it back down after a couple swipes. He heads for the door, taking one last look at the innocent teenager, hurt because of him, unconscious in the hospital bed, before he slips out.

Chapter End Notes

Yayyyyyyy but boooooo let me know how that was!!! I'm super hyped to keep writing this, things are gonna get intense pretty fast so strap in my dudes. Lots of rough spots and bumps in this road. Cuz weve got to catch up to that first moment I teased AND THEN go from there which is when it starts to get really intense. SO trust me, my mind is spinning, this is gonna be great.

As for posting schedule...school is almost done but my intellectual self thought it would be cool to take a summer college class and it's currently killing me SO i will update ASAP hopefully more than once a week, probably like every 5 days but it may be longer so I'm going with the flow ahha

Ok i ramble too much- thank you reading!! It means the world, I hope you enjoyed it and stay tuned for chapter 2!!!

Stay safe and healthy, I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments, and kudos are always appreciated!

I love you all 3000 <3

Burning Bridges

Chapter Notes

HI LOVELY READERS <3 <3

Can I just say.....the response for this story was INCREDIBLE?!?!?! Thank you all so much for your support, comments, and kudos!!! You all are the best, I literally was thrilled when I saw how many of you guys loved it :) I am very excited to keep writing, and I really hope you like the chapter!!!! It's mostly....a crap show because this is where it all goes down. We've got a long ride ahead!! And I've got a lot of coffee to conquer sleep deprivationnnnnnn. They say the notes on AO3 are the best part and I stand by that XD I hope these are entertaining lol

So here we go :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter licked his lips and opened his eyes slowly, blinking in the harsh light. He took a deep breath and felt a fiery pain in his ribs, immediately exhaling sharply as he hands went to clutch the point of origin. Peter's eyes flew open as he jerked awake and looked around, taking small breaths to calm himself.

"What happened-" Peter croaks, staring at the unknown wound before his mind explodes with jarring pain.

"He activated the glider, Peter," Karen said miserably.

Peter saw it gaining speed from down the hallway, Tony's suit with barely enough juice that he was using to kill the Goblin with a final blast.

Peter's voice didn't work but part of him expected Tony to turn around. But he didn't. He didn't see it. He wasn't moving.

"Bye Tony," the man waved, slumped against the wall twenty feet away but even from this far Peter could see his disgustedly twisted grin.

"NO!" he screams, launching himself forward.

Peter lunged, skidding to a stop in front of Tony's chest as he caught the glider with both hands, locking his knees and digging his feet into the ground. For a second he didn't feel pain as the two knives slid into his chest. It was smooth, like cutting butter, and he looked down at the glider, which was still hovering, in shock. Tony's chuckle came from behind but Peter couldn't hear what he said, his ears were ringing. It didn't really matter what he said because hearing Tony's voice was enough for a wave of calm to wash over Peter, knowing he was okay. Peter's steady gaze stayed on the glider for one second longer before his hands fell off and everything snapped back into reality.

There came the pain, so immense Peter let out a gurgle, spitting up blood in his mask, feeling the two knives dig around in his stomach with every breath he took. Tony's hand was on him the minute he understood what had happened and Peter didn't have any energy left as his knees buckles. He went limp, feeling the knives slide out of his stomach as he fell backward, the shiny

edges dripping and glinting with his blood. Tony caught him as Peter whimpered, feeling like he was going to throw up as he tasted a gooey metallic liquid in his mouth. He realized what it was and tried to cough it out but it was already starting to fill his lungs-

Peter gasped for breath and looked down at his chest. He gingerly touched the bandages on his sides and cursed, wincing with pain. Then he looked around the room and saw he was in the med bay at the compound. His shoulders instantly relaxed.

"Tony," he muttered worriedly, reaching for his phone which he saw was on the bedside table. The motion had him suck in a breath and Peter grit his teeth, falling back against the pillow in shock. It felt like fire was eating at his insides, and it was not a good feeling. His eyesight was filling with white spots and Peter took a couple small breaths, not big due to the pain, and centered himself, blinking through the fading vision and the feeling of a knife being twisted in his stomach.

"Come on, you've been worse Peter," he chides. He looks over at the phone and sighs, "Let's just never get stabbed again. Twice." He holds his breath and tries again, holding back a sob as he desperately grasps for the phone. Eventually his finger lands on it and he clutches it, pulling it back until it falls into his waiting hand. He then grins, sinking down into the bed in victory.

Peter unlocks his phone and scrolls, trying to find Tony's contact when suddenly the door opens. He looks up hopefully, and although it's not who he thinks it's gonna be, he's not disappointed. "May!" he sighs in relief and puts his phone aside as she hurries across the room with a choked sob and wraps him a hug, minding his bandages.

"Don't you ever scare me like that again, you hear me?" she demands, brushing a strand of hair back in place and kissing the top of his head.

He chuckles with a wince and rubs her shoulder, a content smile on his face. They pull apart and he smirks, "I'll do my best."

"Are you okay, honey?" she asks slowly, squeezing his hand.

"Yeah, 100%," he winces before he gives her a fake smile. "I'm okay, I promise. It's worse than it looks." She gives him a tight smile back, knowing he's lying. Peter avoids her gaze for the next second, not wanting to feel guilty before he feels his eyelids get heavy. He hadn't realized how tired he was. Startled, Peter is determined to get out a question first, "Hey, where's- where's Tony?"

May's smile falls and she shakes her head, Peter's eyes widening. His heart stops and he ignores the flaring pain as he sits up with alarm, ready to get out of the bed and sprint if she tells him what he's thinking, "Is he ok? Did he get hurt? I thought we got out-"

"He's fine, Peter," she assures him immediately, putting a hand on his arm to calm him down. "He talked to me about twenty minutes ago. He was in here with you a couple before that. Just...we'll try and see him later, ok? I can't explain this one," May says quietly.

Peter, too exhausted to try and decipher what that means, nods, his eyes fluttering. "Well as long as he's safe, it's all okay," he said firmly. "I'm expecting a thank you card from him. It better be...heartfelt...or I'll kill him...myself," he muttered with a smirk, starting to sink deeper into the pillow as he was dragged into sleep.

"Get some rest Peter," she whispered, stroking his hair with a small smile, tears in her eyes.

"Just tell..." Peter murmured, his brow knit in worry, "tell Tony it- it wasn't his fault..."

May didn't answer, her eyes filled with tears that her nephew didn't see because Peter was fast

asleep, pain written over his face, his smile gone, replaced with a thin line of worry and hurt.

When Peter woke up the next time, he was back home, in his apartment, on the bottom bunk of his bed. And immediately he knew something was wrong. Tony would have kept him at the compound to make sure he had an eye on him while he recovered, and he wouldn't have let Peter leave without saying goodbye. Flicking his ankle to knock the heavy covers aside, he groans as he sits himself up on his elbows. His hand goes to clutch his side out of instinct, but he realizes it doesn't hurt as much as he thought it would. His brow furrows, and his spine begins to tingle. Something's not right. Just as he was about to reach for his phone again, which he saw was sitting face down on the end of his bed, May peaked her head in, the door creaking to signal her entrance after a quiet knock.

"Hey sleepyhead," she greets, coming in with a water bottle that she hands as she sits on the edge of his bed, ducking under the top bar. "Glad to see you're finally up. And moving. You with me?"

"Yeah," he rubbed his hair around and nodded weakly. "Yeah, yeah, I'm with you."

"Good," she smiles, offering him the bottle, "You feeling any better?"

Peter gleefully takes the drink and guzzles a bit before easing into small sips. Once he's had enough he sighs and rubs a hand over his face, a gesture he picked up from Tony. Popping the cap back on he shrugs to answer her question, "Yeah, yeah, I guess."

Peter's brow knits in confusion and sets down the water bottle, lifting up his shirt and peeling back the bandage. May gives him a wince and Peter takes a shuddery breath in shock. They didn't stitch up the wound because they knew how that had gone last time, but it was still looking better. The bleeding had stopped and there was a thin patch of skin starting to grow back. Peter moved his hand to his back and found it was the same there as well, the wound was nearly closed, slowly healing. But it shouldn't have been that quick if it had only been a die. Peter slowly lowers his shirt, looking back up at her, "I've been asleep longer than a day, haven't I?"

"Three and a half," May nods slowly with a sad smile. "You were in and out of it once and a while. I got you to eat, but you were really out of it." She brushes a hand under his bangs to feel his forehead. "Fever's down. That's a good sign."

Peter gives her a weak smile and looks at her hopefully, "Has...Tony come by?"

May tenses and shakes her head, "No." Then she clasps her hands and it's her time to smile, although it's forced, "Do you want some soup? You must be hungry. I'll go make you something."

"Thanks May," Peter gives her a smile, and then quickly points to his phone before she can leave the room, "Can I text Ned? He's gotta be worried sick." May smiles and slides it forward and Peter grabs it. He notices her lingering look of sympathy and guilt and he maneuvers his head to catch her eye, giving her a firm nod, "May, I'm ok. Just a close call, that's it."

"Yeah," she said, wiping her eyes subtly and giving him a small wave. "Give me ten to get some lunch ready. Web your door shut if you think you're gonna fall back asleep and we'll wait on the soup, ok?"

Peter gives her a sleepy smile, yawning as he settles back under his covers, pulling them to his chin, "Sounds good."

She closes the door behind her and Peter's eyes narrow once she's out of sight. He waits a minute to

hear her footsteps fade down the hall and then he unlocks his phone and goes straight to contacts. After a minute of searching, he curses and throws his phone down on the bed, his breathing hitching in his throat. Then he pushes the blankets aside enough that he can slip out and takes a deep breath as he sets his feet down on the floor.

Peter reaches up to grasp the top of the bed and pulls himself up, very slowly. He doesn't let go as he takes his first step and controls the pain, steadying his breathing and moving his other foot forward once he gets comfortable with the weight. Then he slowly but surely makes his way over to the mask that he sees laying on the floor. He understands the absence of his suit- May's probably stitching it up and cleaning it because of all the blood. He makes sure he can stay balanced before he shoves the mask on over his head.

"Karen, you there?" he says breathlessly, immediately calming once the mask is over his head. There was something about seeing those screens...it made him feel like someone else, someone stronger, more confident. Someone who could fix whatever mess he was in at the moment.

"Yes, Peter, I'm here."

"Call him, would ya?" Peter says, pressing a hand to his side and leaning against his dresser.

"What contact would you like me to look up?"

Peter falters, his brow knitting before he shakes his head and stutters, "Tony. Call Tony. Who else would I be talking about?" He was used to Karen automatically understanding what he meant by his simple phrases whenever he wanted to call Tony.

"Searching for contact."

"What?" Peter shots upright, straightening in shock. He makes a face and shakes his head again, mustering a nervous laugh, "No, Karen, *call Tony*."

"I don't recall you having a friend named Tony. Is that a nickname?"

"Karen, Tony Stark!" Peter shouts.

"I- Peter, I don't have his number. Why would I? Are you feeling alright?"

"No!" Peter grumbles, before his calm expression breaks. "N- no- no! No! I'm not feeling alright. I'm- I'm losing my mind. What-"

Peter presses both hands against his head and lowers himself to the floor before he can fall. His legs don't complain and they slip out from under him. Peter yelps as the rough jolt sends pain rattling through his wounds and Peter bites down hard on his lip, shuddering. His shoulder shake as he holds back a sob.

Hyperventilating, Peter presses his back hard against the bed and runs his hands through his hair, "What's happening? What-"

His chest grows tight, the lump in his throat so big he can barely breathe. The knot in his stomach is getting twisted tighter and tighter and Peter feels like he's gonna throw up. Tears are building up in his eyes and he tightens the pressure on his temples with his shaking palms.

"We're gonna be the death of each other, kid. I've known it for a while and I pushed it away because...well, because you meant so much to me. But now...with you- you almost died, Peter. And I can't let that happen again. I can't watch you get hurt."

Peter cries out, the voice underwater, and he gasps, clutching his side which suddenly hurt so much more. He felt a pinch in his arm and when he rolls his gaze to the left, sees there's an IV stuck in his vein. Peter wants to tell someone to take it out, but he can't, he can't even talk.

There's a flash and he hears a voice say, *"The kid's right handed. Don't put it in that arm."*

"Med bay is prepped, get me a team. Tony, I need to take him-"

"I'm carrying him Bruce, back off."

"Set him down here. He's lost a lot of blood. I need oxygen! We need to stop this bleeding- puncture wounds front and back-"

"Easy Pete, I'm right here. Stay with me okay, you keep fighting, you understand me, kid?"

"Tony I need you to step out-"

Peter then opens his eyes, but finds he can't- at least not fully. They're only open just a crack, enough to see Tony sitting at his side with his hands on Peter's knee, a sad smile on his face. Peter can't remember the last time he saw the man in tears, or if he ever had. He realizes this was a memory...all of them had been- bits and pieces from when he was slipping in and out of consciousness.

He recognizes the room he's seeing in his mind. It's where he had woken up. But the look on Tony's face scared him. Even though he knew this memory would explain what was happening, Peter now wasn't sure he wanted to know, because of that look. Tony takes a deep breath and blinks again, harshly, biting the inside of his cheek, as if he doesn't want to say the words, but knows he has to. Tony's voice is quiet when he speaks.

"So, I uh- I think it's time we...lose contact for a while, go our own ways."

Peter lets out a mumble of protest on the floor of his room, his hands curling to grip the carpeted ground, and a small sob escapes his lips and he cries, "Tony, no- what are you thinking-"

"Our separate ways. Because we're not...we're not stronger together Pete, the bad guys who want me dead, they want you dead too. And with us being so ready to throw ourselves in front of freaking gliders...you sneaky bastard."

Tony ducks his head down to his chest and composes himself and Peter feels a tear slip down his cheek, although he doesn't know if it's real or not. He just knows the feeling is real. The feeling of having something stripped away while you're helpless to stop it.

"I think the best thing for us to do is stop giving them a reason to use us against each other."

Peter gasps for breath, yanking himself out of the memory. Suddenly, all he feels is anger. He's breathing hard, gulping down air as he centers himself, on the floor of his room, up against the bottom bunk.

"You son of a-" he gasps, his chest rising and falling faster than he had at the start of the flashback. He finds himself smiling for some twisted reason, maybe to hide what he's really feeling, which is like crying. He shakes his head, coughing instead of sobbing before he chokes down his next breath. The tear is still sliding down his cheek and Peter wipes it in fury.

"I know what you're doing Tony. And it's not gonna happen."

Peter presses his palms against the floor, still trying to center himself, his vision going blurry for a quick second. His breathing is shaky and he takes a minute to compose himself before slowly but surely, guides himself to his feet using a well placed web at the wall and the edge of his bed. He grabs his phone and checks the contacts one last time, but just like before, Tony's contact nowhere to be seen. He sighs and then goes to the keypad, typing in the number and then hitting call. He brings the phone to his ear.

Tony's voice answers, *"Tony Stark. Leave your name and problem and I'll get back to you as soon as possible because it's so much more important than what I'm do-"*

"Are you frickin kidding me right now?" Peter demands quietly so May doesn't hear him. There's silence and it just makes him angrier. "What, you think I wouldn't figure it out? Your stupid plan?" he hisses in fury to the man staying quiet on the other line.

"Kid, how did you get this number?"

"Oh, after you deleted your number off my phone you mean?" Peter snarled. "I memorized it, Tony."

More silence.

Then, *"I've got to go, kid."*

"No," Peter snapped firmly, and Tony didn't hang up. Peter snarled into the speaker, "You're gonna stay on this darn call, and *tell me*, what the heck you think you're doing."

"Peter, you know what I'm doing. Don't make this harder than it-"

"Don't make this harder?" Peter repeated in disbelief, spluttering. "Tony, I woke up having a panic attack when you were practically *erased* from my life. And I know what you're doing, because I know you. But this wasn't your fault. So, get that. Through your. Thick. Skull."

Tony doesn't answer.

Peter bites his lip, his finger tapping his side. "He said something to you, didn't he? The Goblin?" He shakes his head knowingly, "I've gotten hurt before, but something happened this time, this isn't different. Either that or you've finally gone mental-"

"Well you haven't gotten stabbed through the stomach before, Peter. That's a new one. You almost died!"

Peter almost gives a sigh of relief; he's talking. He got him to talk. He immediately jumps on it, "Ok, ok, look, you're right, this is a new one. But I knew what I was doing and I would do it again!"

"That's the problem!"

Peter sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, "This isn't just you being pissed, Tony. Look, it wasn't your fault, and you would know that if something else wasn't bothering you. So I know he said something, just talk to me! You can't do this! You can't just cut me out!"

Nothing. Peter would have taken a curse or a screaming match over silence. He takes a deep breath and presses a hand to his head, "Tony, please." His voice came out as a whisper and he knows Tony is fighting him on the other line, so close to giving in and spilling the beans. Peter squeezes his eyes shut and quietly asks, "What did he say to you?"

Click.

Peter's hand curls around his phone and he chucks it hard at his bed, shoving his hands through his hair, feeling a wave of panic creeping up again. Then, breathing hard, he taps into his anger and looks around the room, barely even feeling the stab wounds draining away his energy. Webbing and locking his door shut for good measure, he hurriedly scribbles a note for May, slips on his homemade suit, since his other one is currently out for repair, and his mask.

"Karen- I think he erased some data, but I need you to track the route to the Avengers Compound in upstate New York," Peter limps to his dresser and lifts up his sweatshirt. He ignores the blood seeping through the bandages and grabs his first aid kit, adding on gauze until he can't see the red anymore and wrapping an ace bandage around his waist, praying it holds. Then he opens his second drawer in his desk and takes out both his base card and his backup key card that Tony didn't know he had. He twists and reaches, hissing in pain from the movement, pocketing them both along with his phone.

"Calculating new route. Would you like me to add it to your locations?" Karen asks innocently. She has no idea how hard that just hit Peter.

He freezes and looks down, tears building in his eyes as he curls his hand into a fist. Then he clears his throat, "I- no- I guess- I don't know, Karen, just- just get me there." Then, with a hand clasped over his side, he yanks open his window, climbs out onto the building's brick wall, and closes it behind him.

If Tony wasn't going to talk to him over the phone, he guesses they'll have to talk face to face.

Tony sighs, running a hand through his hair. He sets down the phone he was just on with a Board representative and hears the satisfying click. Shoving aside some folders, he picks up a pencil to attempt some paperwork but throws it down in exhaustion. It's been about 40 minutes since Peter called and he's feeling the guilt now. The pain in the kid's voice, the fact that he caused him a panic attack- Tony almost took everything back then and there, considering the fact that he might be doing more harm than good.

But then he hears the voice crack across the speaker and immediately sees Peter looking at him with wide and fearful eyes that are going in and out of focus. He sees blood drip down the kid's chin as he cries, *"I don't- want to- die-"*

Tony snaps himself out of the horrible flashback that has kept him from sleeping for the past three days and rubs his hands over his face in habit. Then he looks over and snags the handle of his coffee left on a coaster and gulps it down, not even recognizing that's cold and at least a day old. He takes a deep breath, scratching the back of his head before shoving himself backwards to slump in the chair.

His fingers are flying at his sides, his mind pounding, his heart pumping too fast. Tony can feel panic rising as his eyelids grow heavy and he grips the sides of the desk and sucks in a breath, holding it for a couple seconds. When he looks up, he comes to the determination that he needs to fix something, or at least to do something right, for once. Tony makes his way down the steps, dragging his feet, before walking down the hallway and entering the lab. He pushes a 3D screen aside and looks for his wrench and dried blueberries, but they're nowhere to be found.

"Come on, can this day get any worse?" he whispers harshly, his knuckles growing white as he leans forward and grips the table.

"Depends on how this conversation goes." Tony whirls around and sees Peter leaning against the counter, twirling the wrench on his finger and eating the blueberries he had been looking for.

"You shouldn't be here," Tony immediately says, trying to mask a clear expression of shock. It doesn't work. Peter knows him too well.

The kid ignores his statement and instead turns the bag towards him with a guilty smirk, "Looking for these? I kind of finished them off...did you want some?"

"You stealing my snacks?" Tony grumbles, purposely leaving out the smirk in his words with effort.

"You locking me out?" Peter countered with a cold frown.

"Obviously not," Tony gestures to him, since he was standing in the room.

Peter fished in his pocket and held up his key card, snapping it in half. "Oh, no, *your* little 'keep Peter out' plan worked. This is dead."

Tony furrows his brow, "So...how did you get in?"

Peter shrugs, pulling out another card and snapped that one too, "Well after even my backup card failed, which I didn't think you knew about," he admits.

Tony wanted to add that he was the one person who knew Peter best but he bit his tongue, reminding himself that he needed to stick this through.

The kid shrugged, "I just puppy eyed my way through. You know," he pointed, "when you come here every day for the past year and a half or so, people start to recognize you. Shocker, right? Well, it wasn't hard to ask for a few favors." Tony sighed, hanging his head, and Peter gave him a look, snapping, "Satisfied?" He narrowed his eyes, attempting to cross his arms, but he dropped them to his sides when he found he couldn't do that simple movement without wincing.

Tony noticed his pain and flinched with him, shaking his head, "And you swung here?"

"You didn't give me much choice," Peter said darkly. "I called, but you didn't want to talk."

Tony shoots him a look, "You shouldn't have swung here."

"Don't hang up on me, then," Peter counters, matching his angry stare.

Tony sighs and raises a weak hand forward, motioning to his side, "How's- how's your-"

"Great, thanks for asking," Peter cut him off with a fake smile, his nostrils flaring. "You would have known if you came by to say hi at least once."

"That's kind of the whole point, Pete," Tony said weakly. Peter's newfound tone cut like a knife, deeper than he had expected, adding onto the pain that he was already in. And Peter thought he was fine? That he wanted to do this? Of course he didn't, he never wanted to hurt the kid, that was the last thing he wanted. That was why he was choosing to do this. Tony glanced up at him, "I did come by, though. I kept tabs. It's not like I stopped caring about you."

Peter snorted, "Oh, really? Well I would never have guessed that, so thanks for the heads up."

"Hey," Tony growls, but the kid cuts him off.

"Do you want a medal?" Peter asks sarcastically, turning his head. "I'm sure there's one around here somewhere-"

"Pete-" Tony whispered, pressing a hand to his temple. Peter was using his type of sarcasm, the same kind he used when in a situation where he was either absolutely furious or hiding emotion. He figured Peter was a mix of both right now.

"Don't even try and explain," Peter swore. "I heard your brilliant plan of yours. That we're not stronger together, that we're weaker? That we need to go our separate ways, in order to keep me safe? That we're gonna get each other killed?" The teen laughed but there was no humor behind it. "You couldn't have waited at least until I was conscious to tell me that. Or to let me have a say in all this crap."

"I didn't know you heard my big Independence Day speech, first off," Tony hissed, shooting him a look.

Peter narrows his eyes, "I didn't hear the whole thing so if there's some secret you need to tell me, I'd run it by me again," he spat. "I just remember the parts where you say you're ditching me-"

"*And second,*" Tony speaks louder than him. "No, I wasn't about to propose the idea to you because I know exactly what you would have said. I wasn't gonna let you in on this because you were the only one who could have convinced me not to go through with it! I didn't want you to know, and I didn't want to have this conversation!"

Peter felt tears come to his eyes and he walked forward, "So, what, you thought I would just, wake up, and accept the fact that any record I had of you was deleted? Off my phone? Off of Karen? You even talked to May behind my back and somehow convinced her to go along with this?"

"Don't be mad at May-" Tony said weakly.

"I'm not," Peter assured him. "I'm mad at you. Because you think that-" Tony shakes his head and turns to walk to the other side of the lab. The teen is already limping over, somehow faster, and cutting in front of him. "No- Tony- you wanted this, so let's play this out."

Tony turns to face him. Peter's voice is deadly calm, something that scares him because he knows what it means; it's the same thing he does. He would take yelling, screaming, punching, anything...over that calm tone.

Peter starts out quiet, "We check in every couple of days, then it turns to weeks, and then months, and then one day we just never talk again. Slowly, we forget all about each other, and all the bad guys in the world can see that we're obviously not talking anymore. They still come, but we fight them separately. And what do you know? It's turning into a rom-com where we're both mimicking each other's movements in different situations, punching and webbing on opposite sides of the wall, blind to each other," Peter says dramatically, but his eyes flash. "And how do you think I am? You think I'm perfectly happy and better off in a life without you in it- is that what you want?"

"It's a life where you're protected!" Tony yelled. "And safe!"

"I will never be safe!" Peter shouted back, slamming his hand down on the nearest counter so hard it made a dent. He was trembling, his other hand clenched over the stab wounds. "The minute that spider bit me Tony, I knew I would never be safe. And you knew that too! Which was why you made me the suit in the first place! Did you happen to forget how we met? I was in dire need of an upgrade, remember?"

"And what was so wrong about a onesie and swimming goggles?" Tony asked weakly.

Peter snorted. "That's rich! According to you, everything."

"I made the suit so you could fight Captain America, kid," Tony said, his voice slowly rising. "Do you understand how insane that was? I brought a fifteen year old, to fight a super serum Avenger who could have killed you in one single blow. You got knocked out of the sky and thrown across an airport tarmac by a giant man, and thank God you survived that! What if you had hit your head, and not started punching me when I ran over to check on the teenager I had almost gotten killed? I practically forced you into it, too!" Tony exclaimed, his anger with himself audible in his words.

Peter scoffed, "Tony-"

Tony shook his head and whirled to face him, which made Peter stop in his tracks. Tony pointed at him firmly, "Pete, you don't get it. You're not on the weighted end of this ruler. The blame is not on you. It's on me. Without me, none of this would have happened. Without me in your life, you would be safer, you would be staying on the ground, and you would be better off."

"And who gets to decide if I'm better off or not?" Peter demanded.

"Me," Tony hissed.

Peter got in his face and snarled, "Why?"

"Because I said so, kid, so back off," Tony shot back, warning Peter with his gaze. "I am doing this, to protect you!"

"Well I didn't ask to be protected!" Peter yelled, taking a furious step forward so they were face to face. Anger radiating off them in waves and clashed in the middle, just thickening the tension that clouded the room like a blanket of smoke.

"Too bad," Tony snarls, taking a step forward and making Peter step back. "Too freaking bad, kid. Get over it. That's life, sometimes we've got to screw over the people we care about just to keep them safe. And since it's my job to keep you safe, I've gotta do my job, and the only way I know I can do it permanently is if you stay away from me."

"You've got to be kidding," Peter says weakly, but there's venom in his tone.

Tony raised an eyebrow, "Does it look like I'm kidding?"

They're face to face, breathing hard, with gazes that are so full of hate- an expression that they've never really used to each other before.

Tony sees the first curl, and then he sees it swing. Although surprised it was actually thrown, he has no trouble dodging it, grabbing Peter's arm before the kid can twist his torso and hurt himself. "You're gonna rip your stitches, Pete! Stop it kid, HEY!" The teen has his fists curled in Tony's shirt, his eyes furious and Tony stares directly at him and speaks firmly, getting his wrists locked in his arms as they struggle, "Peter, stop, you're gonna rip your stitches. Stop! Kid, you're gonna hurt yourself-"

"I don't care!" Peter screams, yanking away from him and slamming his palms into Tony's chest.

"I do!" Tony yells back in anger.

Peter freezes and then shoves him hard again. Tony takes that one, setting back on his heels as he

flinches. Peter's face is full of pain and he screams, "Then why, *the heck*, are you freaking ditching me? After everything we've been through-

"I'm trying to protect you, kid!" Tony gasps, running a hand through his hair, a lump swelling in his throat. "God, just let me protect you!"

"No!" Peter screams. "I am sixteen years old and I can stop a bus with my bare hands, Tony," he seethes. "I know when I'm happy, and I know when I'm better off, so don't act like you know what's best for me!"

"You obviously don't know when you're better off, or you'd understand what I'm trying to do!" Tony yelled. "This will keep you safe!"

"You're being freaking delusional, that's what you're doing!" Peter yelled, choking on a sob. "That's exactly what you're doing! And for what? Because Goblin told you to? Because Greenie said look out, your kid's gonna get stabbed and this is gonna be your fault?"

"You don't know what he said," Tony swore, glaring at Peter.

Peter's frown intensified and he nodded vigorously, "Then tell me! This is called a *conversation*, it doesn't work if you don't freaking talk!" He kicks the nearest chair, pain obviously rippling through his body at the movement but the kid forces it down with no more but a wince. The chair clatters across the floor, slamming into a table and Tony doesn't react; his eyes are plastered on his kid.

"I think this classifies as a fight," Tony hissed, narrowing his eyes at him before turning around to lean on the counter and catch his breath.

"That's your fault," Peter swore, huffing as he spun around as well. Tony flinched at that. He knew that wasn't what Peter had meant, but that's how his mind took it. But Peter kept talking; he was looking away when Tony winced from his words. Tony turned to lean on the counter and Peter faced him again. Immediately, the hurt drained from Tony's face so the kid didn't have to see it.

The teen stuck his finger forward, "I don't know what *Goblin* told you, but right now, you're choosing his word over mine, and you want to know something? I will never forgive you for that."

Tony snapped, "I am not choosing his word over yours Peter, are you kidding me?" Now it was Tony's turn to get pissed and he launched himself forward, shoving a 3D screen out of his way so hard it crashed into a wall. He pointed back at Peter, "I am *believing* what he said, because he was right! He was right to say that you were going to get hurt because of me, because everyone has, and everyone will, because that's my curse. Excuse me for not wanting to pass that along to you. He was right to say you were too young, because you are-

"I'm sixteen-

"No- Peter, stop- this is where you zip it! The adult is talking." Tony glares at him and Peter shuts his mouth. "He was right to point out the blood on my hands, because God knows they're dripping with it, but do you want to know what? There was one person I never wanted to add to the list that is seared in my brain, and that was you. And now..." Tony spreads his hands before they fall limp and his voice comes out much smaller as the situation de-escalates in a matter of seconds.

"I was covered in your blood, Pete," he mumbles. "Both figuratively and literally. And that was the final straw. You practically bled out on me kid, I watched your eyes fade while I sat there holding you, helpless. And I will not watch that again, I won't. You can't ask me too."

There were tears in Peter's eyes and Tony shook his head and steadied his voice so that it didn't shake, "So this is what's gonna happen to ensure that I never hurt you again. You are going to walk out that door, and we are going to go through with this, because I am not letting you die for me, or even get a paper cut for me, do you understand me, Parker?"

"No," Peter cried, sobs clawing at the kid's throat- Tony could tell. "No, I don't understand, and I don't have to do it- none of this was your fault-"

"Kid-" Tony warned.

"Stop- stop-" Peter clutched at his head like he was about to have a migraine and gulped down a breath like he was having a panic attack. "No- I don't agree- no I won't do it- no- a lot of things- I just- I don't-"

"Kid!" Tony shouted, more harshly. "We're going through with this! I don't care what you say!" Of course he didn't mean it like that, but anger had taken over any thread of calm Tony still maintained.

Peter's eyes flashed and he snarled back, "Don't 'kid' me. I'm not your kid. You're not Ben, and you're not my dad, so stop pretending like you are."

Tony choked. He physically choked. The wrench he had in his hand fell with a small clatter. He saw the instant regret on Peter's face once the words slipped out, and he knew what happened. Tony's words had been jabbing at him, again and again, and Peter snapped, hitting him where it hurt in retaliation. He knew the kid hadn't meant it, but Tony was just so angry, so stubborn, so willing to say anything to get that kid out the door that he didn't deny it.

"Of course I know that," Tony hissed back.

This time it was Peter's turn to physically show pain, in the form of a flinch. "Good," Peter said, his voice cracking slightly and the two glared at each other. Peter shook his head, sobbing, "Your logic is crap Tony. I don't get it."

"Of course you don't get it," Tony snarled. "You will never get it."

"I held my own in Germany!" Peter yelled, tears building in his eyes.

"Because Cap didn't want to kill a sixteen year old! You're a kid, Peter!" Tony said in exasperation.

Peter's eyes widened and the sadness slowly was killed by more anger, a never ending cycle for the both of them, "You calling me weak?"

"Did I say that?" Tony snaps. "No. You're naive! And you should be! You shouldn't be waking up to panic attacks and nightmares that have you screaming every night, you should have a childhood! I compromised that, and I'm sorry-"

"Don't apologize for that- apologize for the fact that you are telling me to get off at this next stop and get out of your life-" Peter shouted.

Tony's head snaps up, "That's not what I'm doing! *I'm* getting out of *your* life, Peter, to *protect* you. You should have never been involved in this mess-"

"So what you're saying is that you wish you had never brought me to Germany?" Peter says quietly.

"Yes."

"And that we had never met?" Peter asks after that.

Tony doesn't answer. He stands in silence, debating that question, and the more time ticks by, the more tears fill the kid's eyes. Tony finally breaks the dead air, "If I had never met you, you would be saving people, having good days-" Tony stops and a sad smile creeps onto his face. "You know when we first talked, the day I met you, you told me that you had a really good day? That you nailed your Algebra test, and found some really good DVD player just sitting somewhere. And then I walked in and ruined it all." Tony looked up and Peter's eyes were glistening and red with tears, and it was then that some spilled down his cheeks.

Tony gave him a rough smile, his eyes burning as well as he remembered the kid's smile of awe when he turned around to face him on the couch, "And you were so hopeful, you trusted me, you believed in me, and because of that, you went to Germany and got kicked around because you weren't ready. And that wasn't your fault, it was mine. So what did I do? I gave you a multi-million dollar suit that I knew you would hack, and when I went back on my word, you got crushed by a building, and beat up by a man who wasn't mad at you, but mad at *me*. You just got in the way and he didn't care that you were sixteen because he hated me that much." Tony walked forward, voice shaking, "I offered you a spot on the Avengers, and do you want to know something, Pete? That wasn't a test. You surprised the heck out of me, until I realized that you made a mature decision. You did what I would never have done. Looking back, I am so glad, you said no."

Peter's face crumpled in pain and he quietly asked, "Why?"

"Because you could be dead right now, Peter. Avengers business is no joke. You sometimes don't come back in one piece. I know how bad you wanted it, I wasn't thinking. You were thinking. And- and the worst part?" Tony let out a sad laugh. "You thought I was testing you. You thought I wasn't reckless and that I was smart and that I was doing the right thing. You didn't doubt me for a second, you never do. You have so much trust in me, so much adoration, and I don't know why. You see someone in me, that I don't see when I look in a mirror. And it makes you lower your guard. You can't tell me it doesn't. But that can't happen anymore, kid."

Peter looked down, his shoulders shaking and Tony stayed where he was, even though it killed him. The kid brought his hand to his side in pain, and Tony could hear his shaky breathing. It prompted him to speak slowly and Tony stared at him sadly, "If I had never met you, you wouldn't be in the pain that you're in right now. Whatever you say kid, it won't shift the blame." Tony straightened and attempted to clear his throat but found he couldn't. He had no strength left, so he simply mumbled, "Now, if you can tell me that's a lie, I'll drop this entire thing, right now. If you can promise me that I never was the reason you got hurt..."

"You are really willing to throw everything away because some baddie told you to?" Peter whispered harshly after a second of awful silence, his voice trembling.

"You didn't deny it Peter," Tony pointed out first, miserably. Then his sadness morphed immediately into anger at his next sentence and he glared the kid, swearing, "And that's not how it is. I'm done explaining myself to you, I've tried every way possible. I am not doing this to hurt you, I am doing this because I want to protect you-"

"Bull," Peter swears, cutting him off violently. "Utter bullcrap."

"If that's how you want to see it, fine," Tony hisses, fire in his eyes. "Trust me kid, I know this is killing you. It's tearing me apart too."

Peter knew better than to look up hopefully at that, but Tony saw his shoulders relax which only caused more pain. He couldn't believe the kid could even consider the fact that Tony was purposely doing this to hurt him. That only acted as more proof that this had to happen.

Tony rubbed a hand over his face, "Pete, you have an undying faith, trust, admiration and a love for me that you shouldn't have. And I have a faith and a trust and an admiration and a love for you kid, that I can't jeopardize again. I am not about to let you down anymore. I've done it too many times."

"Do you hate yourself that much?" Peter whispered. Tony didn't answer and Peter wipes his eye with his sleeve, bringing his other hand to clutch around his stomach like he was going to be sick. "You really want to do this?" Peter whispers, making hesitant eye contact with him.

Tony speaks firmly, "To keep you safe, yes."

"You can cut that crap," Peter swears, shaking his head. "You always want to have the last word, don't you?" The kid's gaze is furious and hurt.

Tony doesn't respond and they stare at each other, fuming. They've never looked at each other this way before. So much anger. So much hate. Bridges burning as their glares continued. Memories forgotten and replaced with anger that blinded them to the real underlying reason they were having the argument in the first place. There was nothing else to it, in their mind, just a cut and dry fight. Unknown to them, or known but not willing to accept the fact, the fight was held up by a sheet of bulletproof glass that was solidified by a year of protectiveness and love. It was cracking, but it wasn't broken yet.

"I'm not walking out that door," Peter says after a minute planting his feet, tears in his eyes. "Go for it. Walk away. If you want this so bad, walk away."

Tony stares at him in pain and he clenches his teeth. Then he turns around and slowly makes his way up the steps to the lab, his gaze set, running images of Peter in pain in his head to keep him going, not understanding that the most pain Peter has ever been in...is right now, not any of those memories. There's a hand wrapped around his heart and it's squeezing and Tony can't breathe. The knot in his stomach makes him want to throw up, getting twisted tighter with every step and he can't even swallow a sob due to the lump in his throat.

Peter stands still, watching in disbelief in pain, trying to convince himself that Tony will turn around and stride across the room and tell him he didn't mean any of it. Little does he know, Tony wants him to stop him, to say anything. If he had even said his name he would have stopped, but Peter's stubbornness and the hold that anger and sadness has on his voice keeps him from doing so. So he just watches through tears and burning lungs that don't allow him to breathe, as the one person who he thought he would have for his entire life...

He walks out the door.

The glass shatters, and everything once believed to never be broken, suddenly falls apart.

Steve grabbed the rail on the top of the jet and ducked, making his way to the back, where mostly everyone was gathered. He felt the ship land and looked around at the restless Avengers. They hadn't even gone into battle, just a conference, but they were all rattled ever since they get the cryptic text from Pepper. He forced his voice to calm and he spoke to the team, announcing, "Ok, I'm going in to find Tony. I need two people to get on the conference call with Ross-"

"We've got that," Wanda nodded with Vision, and Steve gave them a nod of thanks. "And we can handle the press."

"I'll stick with the jet and get the engine coil looked at," Sam said firmly. "Buck, you with me?"

"Yeah, I got you," Bucky said, heading with him to the cockpit and sitting by the radio to get a tech team.

"You tell us immediately when you figure out what happened," Wanda said firmly.

Steve nodded as he punched the button on the side of the wall, "Of course." Sunlight bled into the ship and Steve squinted, waiting for the ramp to lower. Once it did, Natasha, Clint, and Rhodes followed him down and they started jogging across the tar mac.

"I watched the footage...there was no video of Peter being hurt. But Tony knocked the 'Green Goblin', that's what the news is calling him, into a building, Peter followed him in a couple minutes later. He was catching his breath for a previous hit, not fatal. The next footage the news didn't get because I'm guessing Tony erased it," Rhodey said as they pushed open the doors to the compound.

"He's probably in the lab, isn't he?" Clint asked.

"That's where he always is," Steve said firmly as they raced up the steps, not about to wait for the elevator.

"Bruce said the surgery went well. Peter got stabbed twice through the stomach. Pepper said the kid's home now, but something's not right. No one would tell me anything else or answer my questions about Peter. And you guys haven't gotten anything from Tony? Cause I haven't," Natasha said nervously.

"Nothing. I've been spamming him for the past three days," Rhodey shook his head with a wince as he grabbed the door and held it open at the top of the stairway. They all filed through, matching expressions of worry plastered on their faces.

"At least Pepper assured us Peter was ok," Clint said firmly as they rounded the corner and reached the hallway.

"Yeah, but he's not answering any of our messages," Nat said breathlessly as they reached the lab.

"Cause I'm not letting them go through."

Everyone stopped. All of them. Tony was standing by the counter, with a full glass of whiskey in his hand. Nat, Rhodey, and Clint stayed on the steps. Steve was the one to slowly walk down and across the room. "Tony..." he said quietly.

Tony gives him a weak smile that was completely fake and takes another sip from his glass, "Hey."

"What happened?" Steve asked, reaching his friend, hesitantly putting out his hand to steady him because Tony looked like he hadn't slept in a week, which wouldn't be unheard of. He looked exhausted, drained, like he was faking even being functional at this point. Steve saw through the facade, and gave Tony a look to cut the crap. "Is Peter ok?"

"Physically?" Tony raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, he will be. We got lucky."

"Then...what's going on?" Natasha called suspiciously, narrowing her eyes at her friend.

Tony made a face and mumbled, "Peter and I got into a fight."

Clint crossed his arms and leaned against the door, "Understandable. You guys are always fighting. You'll work it out."

Steve knew he was wrong the minute he saw Tony wince. His friend took another sip of whiskey and shook his head, running his hand through his hair. "Not this time."

Rhodey snorted lightly, "So it's a bad fight, you two will make up. That kid's gonna walk through that door any minute now, Tones, and you guys will be as good as new." Natasha nodded in agreement, but Steve was the one who could see Tony's eyes. He had been watching Tony's expression grow weaker and weaker, his face covered with pain and grief.

"He's not coming back. Because I walked out," Tony said quietly, finishing his drink and shoving it across the counter. It tumbled over onto its side, somehow not shattering and Steve caught it before it slipped off the edge.

That was another clue. Tony rarely drank anymore, except at Avengers parties. Of course they all shared a beer after a battle, or when they were hanging out at the bar they had something stronger, but this...this was different. The last time Steve saw Tony drink like this was years ago, before he met Peter, and Steve liked to think Peter was the reason. That kid had done more for him than any of them could, even if Peter didn't see it. Of course all the Avengers loved him, but he had a special and stronger bond with Tony. Yes, parent jokes were made, but with underlying seriousness. It wasn't until Steve saw Tony broken that he realized how much the teen...was apart of him. Something was seriously wrong. Something that Steve was afraid couldn't be fixed.

Tony had always been the leader, along with him. He refused to show weakness, or he would mask it. There was one thing Tony always did, in any situation, and that was use humor. But now there was no smirk in his tone, no spark in his eye. Just pure disbelief and...loss.

"He said 'if you want this walk out', so I walked out," Tony mumbled, looking down and running a hand over his face. "It was the right thing to do."

"What happened to Peter, Tony?" Steve asked, trying to keep things centered so he could understand this mess.

"The Goblin wanted me. He aimed it at me. His glider. Two frickin knives on the end of it," Tony waved his hand weakly. "Peter jumped in front and took them instead," he said. "They went straight through him, Steve. He was bleeding so much, his eyes were filled with fear- he was so scared Rogers- I've never seen him so scared and I just-" Tony's voice started to shake and Steve was on high alert.

"He lost more blood than- I was covered in it, it was dripping down his suit and literally pooling there was so much and he couldn't breathe- and I- he almost died, and I will never let that happen again-" Tony's tone was so miserable it caused Steve pain.

Natasha's hand went to her mouth and Rhodey tensed. Steve looked down and then whispered, "Tony, it wasn't your f-"

"Shut up, Rogers," Tony growled, his hand curling around Steve's shirt as he pointed at him firmly. It wasn't a threat, it was just...misdirected anger. His voice though, was anything but firm; it wavered and cracked. Steve had never heard it crack before.

"He's right, Tony. It wasn't your fault," Rhodey insisted.

"It was my fault," Tony snapped. "It has all been my fault. He almost died, do you get that? He did die! They lost him on the table. How many times is he gonna get hurt because of me? He's sixteen, he's just a kid! I dragged him into this mess..."

"And now you kicked him out of it," Steve finished, now understanding what happened. Tony refused to let Peter take any more bullets for him, so he was cutting their connection. He couldn't help but notice the bent 3D screen against the wall and the overturned chair and he slowly put it together. Peter had confronted him earlier, and things had escalated. There was no doubt the two of them said things they didn't mean, which only made things worse.

"Yeah," Tony said quietly, letting go of Steve's shirt and leaning against the counter. "You have to back me up on this one, Rogers. All of you do," he said, looking at Nat and Rhodey who were watching in shock. "And the team."

Steve shook his head, "Tony, Peter's-

"Not ready," Tony finished. "He's gotten hurt too many times. He's too young. I didn't see that before because I was being selfish. I wanted him to be better than me, to not make the same mistakes as I did, and my doing that I made him grow up too fast. I wasn't thinking about his safety. But he has taken too many hits for me, and if this continues? If he becomes an Avenger, because God knows I would have let him if he said yes all those months ago, and he takes a fall for me again," Tony licked his lips and pointed, "Or one of you? But this time he doesn't get up?" Tony stabs a finger into his own chest so hard Steve thinks it might have hurt, but he doesn't even flinch. "That's on me."

"This is gonna hurt him," Natasha said quietly.

Tony raised his gaze and his eye glistened for a second before he blinked away the tears, "I know. But...but I'd rather have him alive and pissed then dying in my arms again. There's no competition there. I would die for the kid, in a second."

"Tony," Clint protested weakly.

Steve saw it in Tony's eyes. The sadness and guilt turned to anger and he shoved himself upright; previously slumped against the counter. "No. NO! That kid is my son. The closest thing to it. I don't want to do this anymore than you do, or anyone else. It is tearing me apart inside, you have no idea-" Tony takes a gulping breath and lowers his arm that had been firmly pointing. "You will never understand how much it hurt me to walk out that door, but I did it. Because I need to protect him. For once, I need to protect him. This is the only way I know how, do you all understand me?"

Against their wills, the Avengers standing in the doorway nodded.

After a second of stunned silence, Tony took a deep breath, "So we are going through with this, for Peter's sake," he said firmly. "Because I will not let that kid get hurt again, especially not because of me. And- I don't care if he hates me for it." Steve could tell that was a lie, and that Tony was trying to desperately convince himself it wasn't as he swore, "I'm doing this. And you all have to back me up."

Steve looked up at Tony weakly and asked, "Tony..." It was a question, and he never finished it, but Tony knew what it meant.

"I know you don't think I can do it," he nodded, looking down at his feet before shrugging. "To be

honest, I don't know if I can. But either I'm gonna go through with or I am gonna fall apart trying," he whispered. "Peter will not be cursed like me. He's my kid. And I'm going to do whatever it takes to keep him safe. Whatever it takes."

He looks up at Steve with tears in his eyes, a firm plead. There's silence in the room. Then Steve nods and looks back at Rhodey, Nat, and Clint who are both as hesitant as Tony was, but understanding. He claps Tony on the shoulder and nods slowly. "Okay," he assures his friend who's shoulders relax in relief. "Ok."

"I don't know officer, he just- yes, yes, I've tried his phone-" May said worriedly, biting her nail as she paced the room. Rain poured down outside and May was drenched from being outside for the past hour. "I called five of his friends, they haven't seen him- I went looking for-"

She looked up as she heard a noise from Peter's bedroom. There was a loud creak and then a thump. May straightened before she wiped her eyes and looked forward, shoving open the door she had previously shoved her shoulder into a couple hours ago to find Peter gone, the bed empty, the window open. When she entered the room, she nearly sobbed in relief. Peter had climbed through the window, dressed in his homemade suit and his mask, soaked head to toe and shivering. A puddle of water soaked into the carpet as he remained still.

"Thank God. Yes, he's home," she said calmly into the phone, her hand over her mouth to try and compose herself. She brushed hair off her face and controlled her shaking voice. "Thank you for your help- yes- sorry to bother you-" She flung the phone aside and surged forward, her finger pointed at the teenager. "I called five police stations and all of your friends, you didn't answer your phone. You can't do that Peter, not to me- not when you're-"

Peter hung his head and yanked off his mask, crumpling to his knees without even making a sound. "Peter," she whispered, moving forward. Her nephew's shoulders heaved, his hands clasped over his stomach.

Anger dissipated immediately and May felt tears come to her eyes as she knelt next to him on the floor. She gently lifted his chin, brushing dripping wet hair out of his face. His cheeks were shined with rain, sweat and tears. He looked up at her and she had never seen him in so much pain. Peter shook his head, tears streaming down his face, rain dripping off his bangs and lashes, his eyes red. May tugged the blanket off Peter's bed and instantly wrapped it around him, Peter shaking so hard his teeth were chattering.

"Peter, I-" she whispered weakly, rubbing her thumb over his cheek to clear the drops that fell. She pursed her lips and murmured, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

Peter crumbled down further into the floor, putting his head in his hands. Understanding washed over May and she sat down next to him, putting her arm around him and wrapping the blanket tighter as she rubbed his shoulders. Peter shook his head again, pressing his palms to his head as he tried to breathe properly. His voice came out small, exhausted, and...shattered.

"I said...I didn't mean it and then he just-"

Peter looked up at her weakly, and May's heart was clenched by a cold fist. The poor kid couldn't even breathe. There was something broken inside, May could tell.

"I can't-" Peter let out a small cry of pain and he let out a shaky breath, squeezing his eyes shut. May held him tighter, reaching up to shut the window. The storm blew outside, wind howling, rain

pouring down as they sat on the floor, shaking from the cold. Peter's head was ducked so she couldn't see the tears she knew were there.

Chapter End Notes

How was thatttttt :) We love fights >:)

DUNDUNDUNNNNNN and it's just gonna go downhill from here! Why is that a good thing, it's not haha Well I hope you enjoy angst because that was nothing. But how was it? I love hearing you guys' thoughts! That wasn't proper grammar...oh well haha

New chapterrrrr uhhhh soon! This was a sooner submission than I thought, but I just had to post :) next one may be a day or two longer wait so like 5 days? Hopefully less? I get writing spurts and then I finish a chapter in an hour and then can't write- it's crazy. Don't mind me. Anyway, hope you all enjoyed, thank you so much for reading, stay tuned, and stay healthy during this crazy time!
I love you all 3000 <3 <3

The Goodbye

Chapter Notes

Helllooooo lovely readers! I hope yall are staying healthy and safe! Believe it or not it's summer haha who knew? Doesn't really feel like it or is it just me? I'm rambling I need some coffee. Well this is where crap starts to go down. We cut ties, we get closer to the meat of this story, because the ending is where things get intense. But everything before that kind of seals the deal...AND TIME JUMP! Now before I give any more vague details I'll let yall read haha but I just wanted to say thank you so so so much for all your comments and kudos and rants and everything awesome :) The response has been ABSOLUTELY AMAZING and I hope I do all your hopes justice!!! Also OMG yall went OFF on Tony and it made me CRACK UP so yeah, thank you for that haha I'll be sure to make it up to Peter...much much much later teehee

So thank you for your support, I'm thrilled you're liking it and let's get into the storyyyyyyy XD

Read on!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter's phone rang and his eyelids fluttered open. It was 5:45 am, and he was at his desk with his head in his hands, up late because of studying. He shoved aside his chem notes groggily, rubbing his face with his hand as he searched blindly for his phone. When his hand closed around it he saw a blurry name that started with N and sighed.

He brought it to his ear with a yawn and groaned, "Ned, I need my three hours. I was up studying all night for this stupid test-"

"I can call back later, Peter. I didn't mean to wake you. I just wanted to catch you before you went to school and I knew you left early."

Peter straightened, instantly snapping awake. His brow furrowed, "Nat?"

There was a small laugh on the other side of the phone. *"What, you forget the sound of my voice already?"*

Peter looked down sheepishly and leaned against the desk, running a hand through his curls. "No-no, of course not, I just...I didn't expect you to call. I thought-"

"That we're under strict orders to not see you anymore?" He could practically hear Natasha smirking through the phone and couldn't help but crack a smile.

Peter faltered and nodded slowly, "Well...yeah."

"Well then good thing I'm not seeing you, I'm just on the phone. We've all still got your number, kid, and we plan to use it. You can expect a check in call every once in a while. We're all still worried about you, and we all still care about you."

"That's why you're all going along with this crap?" Peter grumbled.

"Yes," Nat said firmly. *"Listen, I'm in the middle here, so don't shoot the messenger. How's your side?"*

"Better," Peter admitted suspiciously. "Nat I-"

"Hey. Just let me explain my side. Five minutes?"

Peter looked at his watch and grabbed his water bottle he had smuggled coffee into, taking a large gulp. "Five minutes," he agreed.

"We're not okay with this. None of us. Even Tony."

"HA! I'd like to dis-" Peter snapped.

Nat cut him off. *"You promised me five minutes."* Peter sighed and stayed quiet, allowing her to continue. *"We're all in the same boat here, Peter. We want to keep you safe. Now, the problem is the execution of said plan. You can get pissed at us all you want, but that's what family's for. It's meant to piss you off. We all want to protect you, and whether you like it or not, you are young. And each and every one of us see ourselves when we look at you. We've been forcing our childhoods onto you because we want you to have one. We don't want you making the same mistakes we did."*

"But have you even considered what I want? That I may want this? This life?" Peter snarled quietly, his hand curled into a fist on the desk.

"No," Nat said and Peter's eyebrows knit. *"No, we haven't, because I think what you want has been heavily manipulated by us, which isn't fair to you. Peter, you can't honestly tell me a day goes by that at some point you don't wish that you were normal. You've even talked to me about it. Football. You want to play it but you know you shouldn't. Or that kid who's a jerk to you at school. Don't you wish you could fight back?"*

Peter didn't answer. He pressed a palm to his temple and took a deep breath. "Yes, ok? I wish I was normal sometimes. Sue me."

"Peter, I'm just trying to explain our side of things-"

He runs a hand in his curls, yanking at his hair before sighing, "Yeah, I know. You're doing better than Tony."

"That's a good segway into my next point. Tony. You know he cares about you, right?"

Peter scoffs, but then there's pointed silence. He mumbles, "Sure."

"I know what that sure means. I get it, you're pissed. I would be too. You guys probably said stuff to each other you didn't mean and are too stubborn to admit that. You argue professionally, and you used all those skills in one hell of a hoedown. But you need to understand something. When we got back the other day and found Tony, he hadn't slept, he hadn't eaten, he was drinking again, and he was pretty broken, Peter. But he was so stubborn and determined to go through with this because it would keep you safe. That's his only goal. You're like a son to him."

Peter's eyes fill with tears and he holds his breath, holding the phone away with trembling hands just in case a small exhale is audibly shaky.

"You both are willing to sacrifice everything for each other, to die for each other. That's a good thing and a bad thing all at once. You're smart enough to know that makes you a target for people

who want to get to Tony. And there's a lot of people who want to get to Tony. He's got a talent for pissing people off."

Peter smiled weakly. Then Nat continued, her smirk fading from her tone, *"But here's the thing. Tony is incapable of...distancing himself from you. If he turns a couple blind eyes he'll worry himself to death. If he pretends you're just an intern it will eat him alive. If he doesn't check up on you after a patrol, he'll think something bad happened to the one person he can't live without."*

"Actually, I think he can live without me," Peter snaps.

"I think you're misusing the definition of 'live without'. You dying is entirely different, Peter."

Peter looks at his feet and nods slowly, "I know."

"Tony can't live with himself if you get hurt because of him again. But it's gonna hurt both of you more if you two try and forget everything that's happened and be strictly mentor and mentee."

"So he's going full tilt," Peter said softly in understanding.

"Because he can't do anything less."

"So you think he's doing the right thing?" Peter demands.

"No. I don't know what to do here, honestly I don't have the answer to this one, Peter. I'm just trying to make sure you see where Tony is coming from. If you're out of his life, maybe you both can...adjust. But every time he looks at you right now, he sees a kid who he was supposed to protect, a kid who he loves like a son, who got stabbed through the stomach for him, who he stole from his life, and who would die for him. Not many things scare Tony, but that does. So that stupid, stubborn bastard is pushing you away. Because he loves you."

Peter takes a deep breath. "Well I guess I'm just as stupid and stubborn as he is. Because I'm not about to apologize for taking that glider, and I'm not about to go make things right. He's got to put in that initiative."

"Peter, he'd rather die than to tell you he's ready to have you risk his life for him."

"That's not what-"

"Deep down you know that's what it is to him."

Peter almost considered it. Then he shook his head, his eyes burning. His voice was firmer than he thought it would be, "No."

Natasha sighed, *"You two are so much alike, it's scary."*

Peter nodded, rubbing his nose. He made up his mind in that instant. Tony was right. They couldn't meet halfway. It was all or nothing, and Peter was going to pick the right road. It was the more painful one, but it would help Tony move on, and he guessed that was what he wanted. He didn't want Tony to hurt, and if that meant walking out of his life, then Peter would do it. He looked down and cracked a small smile, "Yeah...I guess we are. Stay safe, Nat. And tell the team...something I would say."

"Peter-"

Peter hung up the phone and then got to his feet, walking over to the edge of his closet and bending

to slip on his mask, blinking away the tears. "Karen?" His voice shook. "Delete and block all the Avengers from my phone, ok? And anything related to Stark Industries."

"Are you sure, Peter? You cannot undo this action."

Peter hesitates. Then he licks his lips and nods, clearing his throat, "Yes. Yes, all of it. GPS, everything. And do me a favor...can you...forget it too?"

His phone started ringing again from across the room and Peter turns to look at it miserably. He sees the small line reach the end of the display and a green alert that says COMPLETE flashes across his screen. A second later, the phone cuts off, and something inside Peter broke. He couldn't breathe for a second, his lungs tight, a lump in his throat that was trapping a building sob.

"Done. All records deleted. Erasing this action from my central database as well."

"T-thanks," Peter said, blinking again and scratching to find the bottom of the mask before Karen could catch on. Too late.

"Peter your levels are-"

"I know what they are, Karen," Peter whispered harshly, yanking off the mask and letting it drop to the ground. Maybe he and Tony were too much alike. Because he wasn't about to act like they hadn't been through everything together. He was going to burn everything and start over, because that was the only way he knew how to move on. He walked over to his desk and saw the picture of Tony and him in their suits, pinned up on the board. He ripped it down and considered throwing it in the trashcan, but instead he glared at it and buried it deep in the back of his drawer.

Then he took a deep breath, gripped the sides of his desk with white knuckles, and tried to breathe properly. Then he grabbed all of his chem notes and started to organize them, only allowing one more tear down his cheek. The minute it dropped onto his lap he furiously wiped his cheek with the back of his fist and set his jaw. Then he spent the next couple minutes trying to fake a smile.

He was still trying to fake it in the hallway at school, and this time he had to do a better job because Ned was more talkative than usual for some reason.

"Dude, I studied all night and I still don't think I'm ready," Ned laughed. "I mean, come on, it's chem! And it's Mr. Ross! It's literally impossible to get higher than a B in that class. And that's if you work your butt off. I heard he took points off because someone's name wasn't straight on the top of the paper."

"Really?" Peter asked, forcing a grin. He tightened the straps of his backpack.

"Yeah," Ned exclaimed as they pushed past a crowd of students to make their way up the steps. Then his friend tapped his shoulder, "Ok, dude, big news. I was gonna wait until tomorrow to tell you but I can't."

Peter looked over at him, "What?"

Ned's eyes lit up and he whispered, "LEGO Millennium Falcon."

"No way!" Peter smiled weakly, trying to add more enthusiasm to his dull voice. "Are you serious? That's awesome! How many pieces?"

"8445," Ned said proudly.

"Insane," Peter shook his head, holding out his hand as he and Ned did their handshake.

They made their way down the hall of lockers, sticking to the right side. "So, do you want to come over tonight and we can build it?" Ned asked. "Or I can go over to yours. Probably yours because my mom says our house is a wreck. Or wait, shoot, do you have your Stark Industries Internship tonight?"

Peter stopped, dead in his tracks, in the middle of the hallway. His throat closed up and he felt a rising panic in his chest.

"Hey, Peter-" Ned pulled him out of the way as a crowd of senior jocks passed and he looked at Peter nervously, "Dude, you okay?"

Peter snapped himself out of it, digging his nails into his palms. "Yeah, I- uh- Ned..." he looked down and lowered his voice. "I just- lost the Stark Internship, ok?"

Ned's eyes widened and his gaze fell, "What?"

"Oh my God, I'm *so so* sorry. You must be devastated, huh Parker?"

Peter whirled around and saw Flash standing there, a huge grin on his face. His expression crumples and Peter shakes his head, "Leave me alone Flash." He turns to walk away but Flash snags his backpack, yanking him into the locker. Peter winces at the loud slam and Flash grins.

"Wait, so let me get this straight, you lost the internship that you didn't even have in the first place?" the boy snickers, earning laughs from his friends and the couple people watching.

"You done?" Peter snarled, raising his furious glance.

Flash put up his hands, giggling, "Guys, look, Parker's a little defensive. What happened, Pete?" Flash pouted his lower lip.

"Don't call me Pete," Peter snarled.

In response, Flash clamped his hand down on Peter's shoulder, making him wince. "I can call you whatever I want. Now tell us all what happened. Did you and the big man have a little blow out?"

"Shut up," Peter seethed, his hands curling into fists.

Flash's hand tightened and he whispered with fake concern, "Did Tony Stark kick you to the curb?"

"I said, shut up!" Peter yelled, slamming his palm into Flash's arm to knock it off his shoulder. He was breathing hard, red seeping into his eyesight. Just then the bell rang and one of the teacher's called Flash's name from down the hall.

The bully glared at Peter and looked him up and down. "You're lucky, Parker. I'll get you back later. You're in for a world of hurt."

He shoved Peter once in the chest before turning around and walking to his class. Peter hit the locker hard and bit his lip to hide a gasp of pain, his hands going to his stab wounds that he had bandaged up before he went to school.

"I gotcha bro," Ned put an arm around Peter and led him into their room which was only one door down, slipping in before their teacher could notice they were tardy. "Spiderman thing?"

"Yeah, I kind of went to the hospital? I'm also not supposed to be here today. I promised May I would stay home but I just didn't want to miss this test and she's got an all day shift so," Peter groaned, his back aching from getting slammed against the locker.

"How bad was it?" Ned's expression was full of concern and worry as he helped Peter shrug off his backpack and get into their assigned seats.

"Stab wound. Double. By Green Goblin," Peter mumbled.

"Holy-" Ned cursed before he caught his friend's eye. Ned was used to seeing Peter come in hurt. He saw it all the time, which meant he knew the look. But there was something eating away at Peter that wasn't physical.

"Man, are you okay?" Ned whispered, leaning over as he moved his desk closer.

"I'm fine," Peter hissed, rubbing the sides of his head with his hands.

"Peter..." Ned said quietly. "Is it about the Stark Internship? You said- you said you lost it? Did something happen between you and Tony-"

Something snapped inside of Peter. His vision went red and turned to look at Ned out of the corner of his eye before snarling, "If you *ever* mention Tony or the Avengers again, I swear to God Ned, I will..."

Ned recoiled at first but then his shocked expression softened and he nodded, "Okay, Peter, okay." There was no doubt he was worried for his friend, but he hadn't seen that look in his eyes before. The look that something very important was broken inside, unlikely to be fixed.

Ned made sure to not mention Stark Industries or Tony to Peter for the rest of the day, even helped him avoid Flash because Ned knew if that kid pissed him off any more Peter might throw punches. As much as Ned wished Peter could get back at his bully for all he had put him through, Ned knew he would probably be put in the hospital if it came to that. Peter saw Ned watching him, but as soon as he made eye contact his friend would give him a comforting shoulder pat and a soft smile and change the subject. It was a nice gesture, but it didn't help Peter feel better. Nothing did.

"Thai food always makes things better, doesn't it?" May smiled hopefully, later that night. He had come home exhausted, skipped patrol and went right into homework. She found him in his room at 8 o'clock, studying and spinning a pencil in his hand. She rubbed his shoulder and guided him out of the chair, grabbing her car keys. She had to get the kid out of the house.

"Peter," she said again, snapping her nephew out of his trance. "You with me?"

"Yeah, yeah, sorry." Peter returned the grin and nodded, twisting his fork around his untouched larb. He couldn't taste it, and it couldn't fill the gaping hole inside of him. Something was gone, something that couldn't be replaced. What scared him more, other than the feeling of being empty, was knowing he was changing. Something was wrong with him. Realizing he had been staring blankly at his plate, he looked up to not appear suspicious. But as he raised his gaze, he saw May was doing the same and Peter's brow furrowed. Now that he thought about it, she had been acting strange all night too, like she was hiding something for his sake.

He reached over and stole a dumpling from her plate to ease the tension, raising an eyebrow as he asked through a full mouth, "What's up?"

His aunt's gaze snapped up and she smiled again, "Nothing. It's nothing."

"May," he raised an eyebrow. "Come on. It's just you and me, remember?"

"I pulled that card once when you had your ferry fiasco and now you won't let me live it down," May groaned, putting her head in her hands. Then she looked up slowly, muttering, "I was offered a tour today."

Peter nearly jumped out of his seat. This had been something she had been working towards for a while now in her job. For a couple years at least. A genuine smile appeared on Peter's face and he exclaimed, "May! That's awesome!"

"Yeah," she said weakly, a slow smile spreading on her face from his enthusiasm. It was a 180 from his previous mood, which she thought he wouldn't snap out of. "But I'm not going."

"What?" Peter demanded almost angrily. "Why the heck not?"

May's gaze snapped up and she made a face, "Are you kidding me? The timing is horrible! With you hurt, and now...Tony..."

"Screw Tony," Peter said furiously, shaking his head. "May, come on! You've always wanted to do this. We've been planning this out for years! I'm not gonna let you give this up for me. When is it?"

"They would want me to leave in five weeks and I'd be gone for three months," she said before leaning forward and giving him a nervous look. "Three whole months, Peter!"

"This is awesome!" Peter exclaimed, spluttering, "May, you have to! And it's not even right away, either. Everything will be fine in two weeks." That was a lie, but Peter was going to convince himself it was the truth- for May's sake.

"Peter," she shook her head, setting down her fork. "I can't-"

"I'm asking you to," Peter pleaded, moving his chair forward. "May, listen to me. I've screwed up Tony's life, and all the Avengers, and now mine...and God knows I've put yours for a loop too. Please," he begged. "This is the one thing I've heard you talk about for the past three years. Don't let me ruin anything else. You're going."

"You'll call me every day?" May insisted, her eyes widening.

Peter laughed and nodded, "We have a full plan! Remember we wrote it down in that little notebook a couple years ago? It's still in the kitchen drawer."

"Yes, yes, I remember." She pressed her hands to her head and combed her fingers nervously through her hair before groaning, "I can't believe I'm actually gonna do this. I can't believe you're talking me into this! Are you sure? Because if you don't want me to go, I won't. I want to be here-"

"May," Peter grinned sincerely. "This is the happiest I've been in the past couple days. I am 100% sure, I promise. Besides, my side will be fine in a couple days anyway. You're going, and that's that. I don't want to hear it."

May smirked happily, "There's a bonus involved," she admitted. She and Peter highfived and then she set her hands down on the table, sobering her expression. "The apartment will be paid for. You just need to go to school and come home, which you've done before if I take the late shifts."

"Exactly," Peter agreed. "I'll be fine! And if anybody comes in, I'll web them, don't worry."

"No late patrols," she pointed at him.

Peter crossed his heart, "You have my word."

"And you'll be safe?" she asked firmly.

Peter rolled his eyes, "Duh. I'll fail all my classes- I'm kidding! I'll be fine. And I've got Mrs. Leeds on speed dial. Ned said I could stay with him at any time too."

May took a deep breath, "Ok...ok."

"And I gotta practice living on my own for when I go to college!" Peter pointed out, taking a sip of his Pepsi.

May groaned and put a hand on her forehead, "Don't remind me. I've got a couple years left with you, let me savor them. Are you so eager to get out?"

"No, of course not," he laughed. "I'm just...I'm really happy for you May. With everything that's happened...I needed some good news. And this was really good."

"Thank you honey," she said softly, squeezing his hand.

"Now, excuse me, while I finish off my larb," Peter said, immediately digging into his meal that had a spark of flavor once again.

"I larb you," May winked as she finished off her dumplings and they split the sticky rice. Peter had a genuine smile on his face, that he thought he wouldn't have for a long time.

A day later, Tony sat in the lab alone, twisting a screwdriver, aimlessly tightening a bolt on his suit. The TV was on in the background but Tony paid no attention to it. He was just thinking, thinking if Peter had stopped him from leaving, what would have happened then? He wondered how the kid was doing right now. He even wondered if he made the right decision.

"Sir, you should eat. It's been almost four days."

"Yeah, I'll have some dinner later," Tony said, finishing off another water bottle filled with coffee.

"You've exceeded the recommended intake of caffeine."

Tony made a face and sighed, his anger churning inside him as he resorted to sarcasm, "Well then I guess I get some medal, don't I?"

"Tony-"

"FRIDAY!" Tony yelled, keeping his furious gaze trained on the desk. "I'm not ok! Ok? You happy?" he demanded with a laugh deprived of humor. "I am screwed up, a lost cause, a hot mess, whatever you want to call it. But I'm not pretending anymore. I'm done, ok? I'm done. I can't eat because the only reason I did in the first place was because Peter refused to unless I did, I can't sleep because every time I close my eyes I see those two knives being driven into the kid's chest. So if this is what Peter got away from, that's good on him. So just leave me alone, ok?" He tried for a weak smile and shook his head, "Just let me fall apart in peace, that's all I ask."

Tony goes back to focusing on his repulsor when suddenly he hears the news in the background.

"Here is live footage of Queen's very own Spiderman fighting what appears to be the gang that has broken into nearly thirty stores over the past couple months."

Tony hears firing in the background and he turns around in his chair, watching the shaky camera footage. His limbs remain tense as he stares, wincing as Peter gets slammed into a wall before he fires a web back. A second later, the screwdriver and repulsor fall to the floor, forgotten, and the emergency exit door closes, some of the papers ruffling in the slight wind.

The TV is still playing in the empty lab and it pans on Spiderman, the camera zooming in as he's kicked in the chest, blown back to the far edge of the room.

Peter slams into the ground, splitting open his chin. He rolls to the side as bullets pepper the floor before he kicks off the nearest wall and webs the man's legs, knocking in the floor. Peter shoots the ceiling and hits it hard, dropping and catching a punch thrown before tossing the man into the wall. He falls down atop another, flipping him over his back before sliding behind one of the knocked over tables. Something skids to a stop next to him and Peter's eyes widen.

"Eleven seconds!" Karen shouts a warning as the blinking gets more rapid. Peter grabs the bomb and makes a running sprint for the nearest window, smashing through it and flinging himself into the air, launching the grenade as high as he can. The force slams into him and Peter hits the road flat on his back, his head smacking against the pavement.

"Ow," he groans, rolling over onto his elbows. He webs a lamppost and pulls himself over to take cover behind a car, examining the long slash in his suit and prodding his bones to make sure nothing major was broken. His head was aching and he had a bloody nose and Peter took a deep breath, blinking harshly before he jumped across the hood of the car. He didn't see the man behind him get taken down by a beam to the back before he could fire.

Shots rang out and Peter ducked, zigzagging until he got a shot at the gun, webbing into his hand and swinging it full force into the man's chest. He ducked a jab with a knife and twisted, knocking the weapon out of the man's hand and kneeing him in the stomach. Peter tossed him into the next guy and spun, taking a punch to the stomach so he could knock the next guy out before webbing the back of the man and yanking him to the ground. Peter rolled behind the wall to avoid gunshots and climbed it, jumping and rolling across the roof before spiraling down and swinging into the man who had shot him, landing both feet in the small of his back.

Peter's eyes narrowed and he spun on the ground, knocking a man's feet out from under him before webbing both of his wrists to the ground. Peter moved nimbly to the side as a shot rang out, hitting the brick wall in front of him before he shoved his heel back, feeling it sink into a stomach. He spun and slammed his palm into the man's chest, blowing him backward into the car parked on the side of the street.

He saw another grenade in the man's hand and it blew up, tossing the car fifty feet in the air. Peter shoved himself forward, jumping off a car that had probably been moved due to the blast because it was in perfect position. He threw himself up and webbed the vehicle, yanking it backward so it would land in the street and not in the crowd of pedestrians that were behind police lines.

The last man behind him had a gun aimed at Peter's back but he was blasted in the chest before he could pull the trigger. Peter landed perfectly in a crouch in the center of the road, breathing hard. The police moved forward, a few nodding and fist bumping him as they went to detain the criminals. Peter saw the press coming forward with their questions and cameras and he gave them a weak wave, before flinging himself down the street.

Peter didn't even attempt to change, he just slipped on his clothes over his spider suit and yanked off his mask, only able to breathe through his mouth since his nose was clogged with blood. He knew it was broken, but he didn't feel like snapping it back just yet. The longer he waited, the more it would hurt, he knew that, but Peter just wanted a couple minutes without pain.

He made it back to his apartment and kept his head down as he ran through the front lobby to the stairway, checking for anyone who could be watching before he webbed the highest rail and pulled himself up. May wasn't home; she had a late shift, so that was good. He would look slightly better in the morning after patching himself up. He pushed his shoulder weakly into the door at the landing and stumbled into his hallway. Peter's vision spiraled and he tripped over his own feet, about to face plant in the center of the hallway.

Strong hands gripped his shoulder and fisted his jacket, keeping him upright and he heard a familiar voice say, "Easy, kid."

For a second, he felt safe, and he allowed his legs to go limp as the man held him up. Then Peter's brow instantly furrowed and he blinked his vision back to somewhat sharpness, shoving Tony off him. "What the heck are you doing here?" he drawled, wiping blood from his lip. He stumbled, still not balanced and he hit the wall with a wince. Tony surged forward out of instinct but Peter snapped, "I'm fine."

"I...I saw the news," Tony said, respecting Peter's silent demand to back off. He stood with his hands in his pockets near the opposite wall.

"Good for you?" Peter asked furiously before it clicked. The car that had appeared out of nowhere. The men that Peter hadn't remembered taking down. That had been Tony.

Tony connected that he had been suspicious and he nodded, "Yeah." He answered a question Peter hadn't even asked out loud. "I just- I just wanted to help."

"You wanted to help?" Peter snarled, laughing in disbelief as he made his way down the hallway, hearing Tony following him a few steps behind. "It's a little late for that."

Tony shifted his weight from foot to foot once they stopped at Peter's door and mumbled, "Is it, Pete?"

Peter looked up but didn't respond. Was he apologizing? Was he taking back everything? Maybe if he had said no, it would have been a different talk, but Peter's anger and pain got the best of him and he grit his teeth, "Yes."

Tony physically recoiled and Peter regretted his answer. He wanted nothing more to make things right. Especially if Tony had instigated it. Peter knew deep down he might have just lit the match that was going to burn the last link that still stood. Anger wrapped around both of them and held on, rising in the tense silence.

Tony gave a small lip curl that was an attempt a smile. Then he rubbed his nose casually and blinked. "Oh," was all he said in response.

"What are you doing here, Tony?" Peter said miserably, forcing his voice not to shake.

Tony looked up at him and there was more pain in the man's eyes than he had ever seen. "To be honest, kid? I- I don't know," he whispered.

"Well maybe you should have figured it out before you came," Peter said, digging out his key from his pocket. He fumbled for it and because of his shaking hands, dropped it. It landed on the carpet and Tony went to grab it since he was closer but Peter snatched it first, glaring at him. Tony slowly straightened, and Peter could feel his eyes on him as he unlocked the door.

"You're hurt," Tony said, gently. Another offer of a segway into a talk where they could fix things. Peter shot that one down as well. He didn't know why. He just did.

Peter scoffed and looked over his shoulder as he tossed his bag inside. "And you care, why?" Tony flinched but Peter didn't see it. Then the teen spun around and Tony pressed his lips together and looked down, suddenly fascinated by the floor. "News flash Tony, I still get hurt even when we're not best buds."

"I know that," Tony responded simply. "I just- look I saw the news, I saw you get- I couldn't just sit there, okay?"

"Well that's what you wanted, right? You wanted to just sit there. You wanted me to just sit there. That was your big plan, remember?"

Tony shot him a look, "No, Pete, it wasn't-"

"So are we gonna pretend that massive fall out didn't happen? Is that why you're here? For once in your life are you going to apologize?" Peter demanded. Tony could have answered but Peter didn't give him the time. Instead he faked a sigh and gained enough courage to raise his hands, his voice rising with every question he ruthlessly shot at the man in front of him, "You waiting for us to hug? To make up? To have a long cry and make it all better? You think it's that easy?"

"No, of course not," Tony hissed back, matching Peter's fury. The temperature seemed to drop as their tone's became icy, but there was nothing but fire in their eyes.

"Well then why are you still here?" Peter demanded quietly.

"I just thought..." Tony trailed off before he shook his head and took a step back, "We're obviously on two different pages. I see you're fine without me." It wasn't a statement, it was a question. Peter spent more time with Tony than he had anyone, and he knew the way the man spoke. He was asking him.

"Yeah, I am," Peter said without thinking. His mouth had blurted out before he could even consult with his brain and that burning heat in his chest.

He froze.

Tony froze.

There was something seriously wrong her, neither wanting to admit it. The air was cold and tense.

Neither spoke for the next couple seconds. They exchanged glances, that held thousands of words. Each time the other avoided eye contact the other was pleading for them to stay, an apology written out so clean a two year old could have seen it, but the expression never held long enough. When their gazes met, they clashed with fury and stubbornness and anger because of the things they had said but hadn't meant.

Then after a full minute, they come to a conclusion. It was eating away at the two of them inside, making it harder for them to even stand up on their own. But they both maintained enough energy to make it seem like they were fine, like they wanted this, because they assumed the other did. With how long they had known each other, or how well rather- how they knew each other all the way down to the twitch they made when they were lying, to the joke they made when they said they were fine, to the way they planted their feet when they got defensive...you would think they would have caught this one.

Apparently not.

"Make sure you fix yourself up, kid," Tony says, clearing his throat as he takes another step back.

He gestures to Peter's cuts before he looks down and takes another step backward, missing the full on wince from the teen in front of him.

"Yep. You should go," Peter says through tears, nodding and crossing his arms.

"Okay then," Tony says quietly, shoving his hands back into his pockets.

"Okay," Peter agrees weakly, but there's a bite to his tone, managing to maintain narrowed eyes.

Tony turns around and walks down the hallway before he stops and turns around. "T-take care of yourself, Pete."

Peter doesn't answer because he can't. Because the lump in his throat is too big and he doesn't want to say anything else he doesn't mean. He feels so nauseous he does the only thing he can do, he just gives him one final glare before he opens his door and walks inside and slams it. It rattles and dust falls from the hinges that creak.

Peter stands there, his hands shaking, for a good minute, before he presses his back against the door and sinks down to the ground. He digs his head into the wood behind him, his hair bunching up as Peter feels his entire body let go. A wave of pain washes over him, his insides churns and his mouth is dry, the knot getting twisted tighter and tighter in stomach.

There's nothing to him in that moment. He doesn't feel anything, and it scares him. He feels empty, the tears haven't even made his eyes sting yet. And the feeling of dread, of not feeling...anything, that's what breaks him. But worse is the guilt. The first fight? 100% Tony. Maybe that wasn't true, but Peter's stubbornness could convince him that a majority of it had been. But this one? This one was on him.

Tears stream down Peter's cheeks and he holds his breath until he hears the closing of the landing door that led to the steps. He ducks his head down into his legs, blood dripping down his chin from his nose that had started bleeding again. Peter then feels the severity of all of his wounds- some even starting to bleed again, like he was truly falling apart. Holding back a sob, Peter cracks his nose back into place with a slight cry. But he doesn't even feel it.

He does feel the pain of a single word that hadn't been spoken.

What hurts more than the actual fight, is the fact that he knows that was the last one.

That was goodbye.

3....Months....Later

Peter tucks the phone to his ear and nods, "Yeah, May, I'm fine. The news exaggerates. Look, you can't worry every time you see me get slammed into a wall!"

He pokes his side which is still a little sore from last night's patrol. May got the news a little late and Queen's always made Spiderman out to be a hero who got pummeled by all these criminals and still managed to win.

He grins and grabs a banana, plopping down on the couch for the remainder of the call, "Yeah, everything's fine here, I swear. I just watched a movie and did some homework and then facetimed

Ned. I'm about to go to the store. Yeah. Normal Saturday. Just stay safe, ok? Hey! I am doing fine on my own! In fact, it's a lot quieter- I'm kidding, I'm kidding! The dishes?"

Peter looks over at the filled sink, "Spotless kitchen. It will be. Eventually. Definitely by the time you get back so don't worry! Love you too. Bye."

Hanging up the phone, a wave of exhaustion passes over him. He kills his faked smile and sighs, wandering over to the kitchen to pour himself coffee into a thermos. He drinks half of it and then fills it up again, hoping it will keep him awake since he only got 45 minutes of sleep. Then he snags a packet of dried blueberries, downing the bag in one gulp after realizing he forgot to have breakfast and lunch.

The newspaper is on the table and Peter flips it open, shuffling pages aimlessly while he looks for the sports when an article catches his eye. Peter sees a picture of Tony and his face falls, He quickly turns the page and then closes the newspaper all together, tossing it in the trash.

Then he grabs his phone and keys and jogs out the door, locking it behind him and heading for the steps. Peter checks the stairwell before shooting a web at the top and lowering himself to the bottom, shoving the door open with his shoulder and walking into the lobby. He's about to put in his headphones before he hears someone calling his name.

"Mr. Parker! Peter!" One of their neighbors waves to him by the door, two guys flanking him. "These men want to talk to you!"

Peter's brow furrows and he walks over, smiling at Mr. Riggs who pats him on the back and walks away. There are two men in suits, and they smile, "You're Peter Parker?"

He holds out his hand and they shake it, "Yeah. Yeah, that's me," he says slowly before crossing his arms. "Who's asking?"

"We're with your Aunt's phone service. She's overseas, is she not?" they asked.

Peter nods, "Yeah, she won't be back for a while. Why?"

"Well the provider package you currently have only allows a certain amount of calls and you're very close to exceeding your amount."

"How close?" Peter sighs.

"Less than 10 calls," he says sadly.

Peter curses, "That sucks. And going over is a lot of money I presume?"

"More than we would like to have to bill you for, yes," he nods slowly. "We would gladly switch you to our premium package, for the same price, since your Aunt is a Silver member. It would require us to provide you with another phone with which you would have access to unlimited calls. We wanted to leave that up to you."

Peter gives them a weak smile, "Look guys, I don't pay the bills and I don't think she would be too keen on me calling the shots, you know? So, I'll talk to her later and call you guys with a decision?"

"Yes, of course," the man smiled. "Please, don't hesitate to call and we'll be happy to set you up."

Peter took the card he offered and slipped it into his pocket with a smile. "Thanks. Have a good

day gents."

"You too Mr. Parker," they nodded and Peter waited for them to leave to not appear awkward before he walked out as well, turning the other way, about to cross the street when a biker comes out of nowhere, flailing on his handlebars. He goes flying off and Peter drops his phone, kicking the bike out of the way and staggering to catch the man before they can both faceplant on the sidewalk.

Peter laughs and steadies the person who grins and claps him on the back, "Holy- thanks kid-"

"You okay?" Peter asks as the man brushes off his pants.

"Yeah, are you? I thought I was gonna flatten you!" he exclaims, looking Peter over to make sure he hadn't hurt him.

"Luckily I've got good reflexes," Peter grins, picking up his bike for him.

"Oh crap kid, your phone-" the man's smile falters.

Peter picks up his broken phone, wincing at the cracked screen before looking down the street. He sees the two men, their hand up waiting for a taxi and Peter claps the man on the back before starting to jog away. He shrugs it off and points at him, "You know what, don't worry about it! Have a nice day, okay? Be safe!"

Peter takes off running, pushing past people until he reaches the two men who are about to take a seat in the taxi. "Sir!" he yells, holding up his phone and giving them a wave. Once understanding the situation, they smile, telling the driver to go on, before shutting the door. The taxi pulls away as Peter reaches them, breathlessly holding up his broken phone.

The man hides a laugh, "Mr. Parker, have you rethought your decision so fast?"

"You guys...have seriously bad timing," Peter shakes his head with a smirk, showing off his cracked screen. "I think I'll take that new phone now."

A couple minutes later they're back in the lobby, wrapping up everything, and Peter nods, "So you have my aunt's number, you can tell her what's going on?"

"Yes, we will contact her tonight and your phone will be here shortly. We just need to active it first and transfer your data," the man nodded.

Peter nodded, "Yeah, icloud sure is a pain but hey, it's worth it, right?"

"Sure is," the man laughed. "We'll have your aunt up to speed as soon as possible. We will alert her that there is a waiting period for the phone so you two may have to go a couple days without contact."

Peter sighed, "Well, she won't like that but what can you do?"

"Well that's what email is for," the man smiled.

"True," Peter nodded, before he holds out his hand. "Thank you guys, for all of your help. I really appreciate it."

The men nod, "Our pleasure. If you have any problems, let us know. Once it's all set you don't have to worry about the overseas billing."

"Awesome," Peter grinned, shoving his hands back into his pockets.

The men wrap up and stand, nodding at Peter and thanking him for his time before they head out the door. Peter reaches to call Ned before realizing he didn't have a cell phone. Peter shakes his head and sighs, before remembering what he was supposed to do, which was go to the store. He walks out the door and goes to wait by the bus stop which, by checking his watch, will be coming in seven minutes. It's then he sees the poster tacked up on the side. It's Stark Industries, with a picture of Tony pointing at the viewer. Peter's expression crumples and he instantly turns around and jogs across the street, tossing his broken phone into the nearest trash can.

Four hours later Peter knocks a man into another trash can on the other side of the city. The can clatters to the ground and promptly spills into the street. He helps the man getting mugged to his feet and gives him a nice salute before waving him off. He runs for the main road and Peter turns, webbing the man's left foot to the ground, before straightening.

"Get a job buddy," Peter quips, before pointing at the web that leaves him stuck to the curb. "That will dissolve in an hour or two so hang tight, I guess."

Peter winks before he flings himself into the air. Jogging across rooftops he makes his way to the edge of one of the tall buildings and plops down with a sigh. He pulls off his mask and turns on the external mic, looking around as the cold wind blows through his curls.

"Don't you have a test tomorrow, Peter?"

Peter rubs his sweaty bangs and nods, looking around at the city, "Yeah. Calculus. What, did you turn into May?" Karen laughs and Peter cracks a small smile, sighing deeply, "I just wanted to catch my breath for a bit, take a break, you know?"

"I understand."

"It's really pretty, isn't it?" he says quietly, listening to the familiar sounds of horns, busses, subway sounds, people who are still up. Some people may think of it as noisy and chaotic, not calming at all, but to Peter...this was home.

"Yes it is."

The sky is dark, a smooth background against the thousands of lit up buildings, stretching down long strips of buildings. Peter looks down the massive drop to the road and kicks his feet in the wind. He used to be afraid of heights until he climbed to the top of the empire state building and lunged off. It was like getting thrown into the deep end of a pool without knowing how to swim. Peter got over his fear really quickly after that and then preferred to be higher up. It always felt calmer, especially on nights like these when the sky was empty of clouds.

The same memory returns to his head and he smiles, "You know Tony and I used to go up on the rooftop at the compound. Stupid," he laughed to himself. "It was the one time we got deep and talked about life or something. And here in the city there are too many lights, so you can't see the stars...but there you could. Crystal clear in fact."

"If you don't mind me asking, who's Tony?"

Peter's smile fell and he thought about that question before shaking his head and raising his chin, "No one." Peter swallowed the lump in his throat, "Just someone from another life. I burned that bridge a long time ago."

No one could mistake or miss the pain in his voice. Karen hesitated, then asked, *"He was...important to you?"*

"Was. Yeah," Peter nodded thoughtfully before running a hand over his face and shrugging. "Now he's...well, I don't know. Let's just say we had a falling out and don't really care about each other anymore."

"He hurt you."

Peter scoffed, "What gave it away?"

"Your vitals are-"

Peter winces, "Karen, that was rhetorical. Maybe we can leave the vitals out of this?"

"Yes, sorry. I should be more sensitive."

"We'll work on that," Peter cracks a smile before he nods. "But yeah. Hurt is an understatement. I kind of fell apart, you know? I felt like the one thing I thought I would always have was just taken away from me and I couldn't do anything about it."

"I'm sorry, Peter."

"Yeah," Peter smiles fakely. Then he takes a deep breath and makes his voice sound more upbeat, "But it's been three months. So..." he trailed off. Then Peter sighs, chuckling weakly, "I'm all good now. I can go to sleep without having a mental break."

There's a pause. Then Karen asks, *"But can you truly rest?"*

There's another second of silence. Then Peter clears his throat and shrugs casually, "Doesn't matter. I was never able to. The point is, what's done is done, and I've moved on. It was for the better."

Karen didn't say anything, but she knew he was lying. There are tears in his eyes that he doesn't let show as he blinks them away. Then he shoves the mask back on after taking one longing look at the city and checking next to him for the person that would always be there in his faint memory. Seeing the empty roof top, Peter clears his throat and forces a smile, "May's gonna kill me if she knows I was out this late and I hate lying to her so let's get back before 11."

"Calculating fastest route."

Four minutes later, Peter's back to the alley where he changed and webs his backpack, dropping to the ground and snagging his backpack from behind the dumpster. He leans forward, digging into the bag and taking out his clothes. Peter slips off the suit and yanks on his jeans and tshirt before stuffing the suit down to the bottom, underneath his books. Then he shrugs on his jacket and kneels to zip up his bag.

That's when he hears it.

Peter's spider senses don't give false alarms. Not anymore at least. They used to give off a warning when a cat was walking by, or when a pigeon was eating from the sandwich crust someone had dropped. Not anymore.

Peter's first thought was fear. Whoever it was, was on the back end of the alley meaning they had been watching. They saw him take off his suit and drop from a web, so they now knew he was Spiderman. But Peter had his back to them, meaning if he didn't turn around, they would have

never seen his face. His only option was to take his bag and walk out, and lose him in the streets and then never use that alley again.

So Peter calmly and discretely slipped on his webshooters that he kept at the bottom of his bag. He pulled his sleeves over them and then got to his feet, slung his backpack over his shoulder, and made a mental note to stash this one in his closet and switch it out. Keeping his breathing even, he walked briskly towards the main street, making his way through the alley.

Just as he's about to reach the road, his senses spike again and Peter ducks as an arm swings over his head. He punches the man in the stomach and tosses him over his shoulder, spinning around and storming forward. An arm wraps around his throat and Peter tucks and rolls, slamming the unknown attacker into the ground.

He hears a click and Peter dives to the side, hitting the far wall behind some broken crates. A shot rings out but Peter knows it's not a bullet. He's been involved in too many heists and heard too many shots to know that whatever was pointed at him was not a gun. He crouches, breathing hard as he hears some of the men approach. Peter looks around and wraps his hand around a metal pipe, ready to pounce. He lunges early, catching them off guard, thrusting his palm out to knock the gun out of the man's hands. He swings the pipe, hitting a man across the head and knocking him out before spinning and kicking the next man's legs out from under him.

He rolls, staying on the ground before webbing one of the crates into his hand in the shadows and swinging it. It crashes into one of the men and Peter takes a running slide under someone else's legs, jumping up and driving his fist into his stomach. He catches the punch thrown and twists his arm, spinning and body slamming the man into his partner. They both fall and Peter's gaze moves to the side, rolling away as someone makes a grab for him. He flips to his feet and kicks the man across the head, jumping off the wall to land another blow.

Peter staggers forward with momentum, snatching the pipe again but this time it's caught by a guy who is about two times bigger than him. Peter snarls and kicks him in the gut before flipping over him, maintaining his hold on the pipe, forcing the man to let go. Once he staggers forward with a broken arm, Peter kicks him hard in the back and then nimbly moves to the side. He spins and sees a tranq gun in the man's hand and Peter ducks the shot but hears another a second after. He doesn't quite avoid that one, feeling something skim his neck.

Cursing, Peter runs forward and slams his elbow across the side of the man's head, clutching a hand to his bleeding neck at the same time, already feeling dizzy. He spins and dodges the first swing but not the second. The fist catches him across the jaw and Peter hits the ground hard, his stomach lurching, already becoming nauseous. He scrambles to his feet but he's kicked in the back. Peter slams into the wall, groaning as he crumples to the ground, trying to catch his breath. The world is spinning and Peter can't breathe. He grasps at the ground to center himself, blinking away the sting in his eyes as he gasps.

His eyesight is fading, white spots clouding his vision as he uses the wall to pull himself to his feet and raise his fists. He gets in one good punch but then is slammed into the wall by two men. Peter's head hits the stone hard and he cries out before he's roughly shoved forward. He twists, trying to jump away but he's wrestled to the ground, a foot connecting with his side when he tries to struggle. He fights as he keeps fighting, sheer force eventually becoming his downfall as he's pressed against the wet ground, his stomach scraping against the stone. Peter opens his mouth to yell but instead tastes dirt as a boot hits his jaw, slamming his chin into the damp ground. He feels the skin split and Peter gets another punch to his eye as he weakly raises his head. He lets out a moan of pain, his cheekbone stinging. He can feel the blood dripping down his cheek.

"Shut up, brat."

That pisses Peter off. In anger, his eyes narrow as the last bit of adrenaline kicks in. He bucks everyone off him and rolls away, grabbing the metal pipe and brandishing it threateningly. He's blinking harshly at the men in front of him, unsure of how many there are due to his double vision. He feels a small prick in his back and Peter groans, dropping the pipe. It falls with a clatter, hitting the ground before he feels an arm wrap around his throat.

"Give him another dose, just to be safe."

"How is this kid still up?"

Peter claws at the arm that is choking him, his lungs starting to burn, his eyes starting to roll in the back of his head. In a panic, Peter's face turns red with effort, trying to find the strength that he once had. But then he feels a needle sink into his neck, something entering his bloodstream and his legs slip out from under him. His limbs lock and Peter's arms hang at his sides, his head slumping. Whoever it is, pushes him down and Peter hits the ground on his side, feeling a rib crack, his body trembling as he fights whatever he was injected with. A hand steps on his wrist and he feels the web shooter crack and fizzle out. Peter groans in anger and pain, feeling like a piece of him was just stripped away.

The men he had beaten the crap out of all circle him and Peter hears a van pull up, the wheels stopping feet away from his head. He's pulled to his feet, his backpack ripped off of him and at that, Peter curls his fist. He forces his eyes open and with blurry vision, makes out the form of one of the men, swinging a right hook as hard as he can before thrusting his knee forward sloppily. He's hit across the back of the head and slumps forward into two arms that yank his wrists behind him but Peter smirks at the curse of pain from the man he had taken down. His wrists are locked behind his back and he feels his other web shooter yanked off, the man snapping it in his fist. Peter goes limp, letting out a cry of protest.

"The kid's a fighter, like he said."

A rough hand grabbed a fist full of his hair and someone else grabbed his collar, tossing him up. For a second Peter feels weightless, and then he hits the floor of the car hard, coughing up blood. He groans and curls on his side, pain overriding all his senses at the moment. Peter weakly looks up and sees a boot a couple inches from his face.

"Night Spidey."

It connects with his forehead and Peter's head slams into the metal bottom of the van, his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

May takes a sip of her coffee and closes the door behind her, smiling at her coworker, Chris, who nudges her shoulder as they walk down the steps together and start along the path, "What's up?"

"Nothing," she assures her, wrapping her coat tighter around her shoulders. "I got an email from my service provider. Apparently Peter broke his phone. That kid will be the death of me," she laughs before putting up her hands. "But! But, good thing is they had offered him a plan earlier that would mean getting a new phone and the only reason he didn't take it was because he wanted to ask me first."

"Oh, wow, so responsible!" the man laughs.

May nods, "I know! But it was the right call in the end because apparently we talk to much. We were going to go over our call limit."

"The overseas calls," Chris nods, sighing with annoyance. "They always get ya, don't they?"

"Right!" May exclaimed, brushing hair out of her face. "So Peter won't be able to call me for a while until they get it set up *and* get him a new phone. So we can only talk on email now."

"Well at least you still have contact," he smiled.

May smiles, rubbing her shoulder, "Yeah, it's better than nothing."

"I'm sure he misses you," Chris adds.

"I miss him too," May sighs before she lets out a laugh and finishes her coffee. "But I'm sure he's fine without me."

Chapter End Notes

DUNDUNDUNNNNNNNNNNN welllll crap hit the fan didn't it? Now it's into the good stuff. Well not good stuff but more intense stuff, you know what I mean haha What did you think? I love hearing your thoughts they are so encouraging and I really appreciate all feedback! :)

Thank you guys for reading, I hope you enjoyed and man....strap in because we're in for a very very very rough ride muhahahahah

New chapter innnnnnn lets say same time frame and be hopeful? Usually I can get them done in like 4-5 days so I'm gonna go with that haha. Anyway stay tuned and stay healthy everyone and keep Peter in your thoughts because...its not looking good for him. AND WHERE IS TONY?

All will be answered next chapter- well most haha

I love you all 3000 <3

Zero To Sixty

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyyyooooo lovely readers!!! Did you know that an onion ring is just a vegetable donut? I saw it on a marvel meme and now I'm overthinking everything in my life it's great.

ANYWAY This was BY FAR my FAV chapter to write! It's when everything starts to click into place and things are gonna get intense aka 0-60 title lol i thought i was clever. Sometimes chapter names are good and sometimes they aren't so I apologize in advance and for previous names XD A lot of questions get answered and we start to dive into the good stuff muhahahaha I am very excited

I really hope you enjoy and once again want to thank you all for your awesome comments and kudos it really means a lot! This story has gotten so much support it's incredible so ahhhhh thank you smmmm :)

I hope you guys are staying sane and if you're not, I hope this keeps you sane???? Hopefully???? Warning: angst level high. But that's what you guys signed up for so you already knew that.

Thanks again, I'm gonna go drink some coffee XD and I really hope you enjoy the chapter!! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter's smacked across the head and he groans, blinking in the harsh light. There are two men standing in front of him, and once his fuzzy vision sharpens, he recognizes both of them from the group he kicked the crap out of in the alleyway. He feels dried blood in his nose, practically tasting it as he inhales and Peter makes a face, trying to jerk himself awake.

"Now that's not a proper way to wake someone up, now is it?" he slurs, getting slapped again. Peter's head whips to the side, feeling a stinging red hand print on his face and he spits out blood, trying to regain his senses. He's cuffed to a chair and his neck is sore, like he's been drugged- which he has. The metal binding his hands is stronger than normal and Peter wonders why he can't break it, first thinking it's because he's sluggish, but then one of the men grabs the back of his chair and turns him around.

There's a man sitting in a chair, Peter's backpack slumped on the floor. Peter gulps, because they no doubt know he's Spiderman by now. The memories start to flood back, the bits and pieces of the van ride, after the foot hit him in the head. *Night Spidey*.

Well they were smart, he thinks as he twists his wrists in the cuffs. These weren't just metal. Peter holds back a groan and straightens in the chair, unsure if he should instigate the conversation or not. The man has his legs crossed, and he's reading one of his chem books, looking through Peter's notes. Not creepy at all. Peter squints, but even with his enhanced vision, he still can't make out his features in the shadows.

"You have nice handwriting," the man says.

Peter snorts, trying to hide a laugh, "Sorry. I'm sorry," he sobers his voice and cocks his head, "I just didn't think that would be the first thing out of your mouth."

The man next to him raises a hand to probably to land a hit on his jaw but the guy in the chair raises a finger and he lowers his hand down to his side. Peter snickers and sticks his lower lip out at him, winking and smirking, "Yeah, that's right. Heel."

"I'm full of surprises, Peter," is the harsh response, and Peter turns back to his main priority. Something about the man's voice seems familiar, but Peter can't quite put a finger on it. He's heard it before. Recently.

"Is that so?" Peter asks, keeping his breathing steady. He could get out of this, right? No biggie.

The man nods and closes his chem book, before reaching into his backpack and pulling out his red and blue suit, slowly, his eyes trained on Peter as he taps the fabric with his thumb, "And so are you."

Peter shrugs, a little uncomfortable by the man running his suit between his fingers, "You got me."

"A little young Spiderman," the man snickers, still admiring the suit, "still in highschool, Pete?"

"Don't call me that," he snaps automatically. "Mind me asking your age?"

"Yeah, I do, actually. We haven't gotten to know each other yet," the man says firmly before exclaiming, "This suit is beautiful material. Who made it?"

"Your sister," Peter snaps. "And yeah, really nice. It's spandex. No chaffing."

The man smiles, "I see." He tosses it aside and Peter winces as his suit is discarded on the floor.

The man gets out of his chair and walks forward into the light and Peter blanches. "You've got to be kidding me," he curses. He knows this guy.

Peter steadies the person who grins and claps him on the back, "Holy- thanks kid-"

"You okay?" Peter asks as the man brushes off his pants.

"Yeah, are you? I thought I was gonna flatten you!" he exclaims, looking Peter over to make sure he hadn't hurt him.

"Luckily I've got good reflexes," Peter grins, picking up his bike for him.

"Oh crap kid, your phone-" the man's smile falters.

"Name's Damian. I think I owe you a thank you for saving me from taking one nasty bike spill, huh?" the man grins, crossing his arms.

"Is this your way of saying thank you, Dames? Can I call you Dames?" Peter asks.

"No."

"Ok. Because if it is, I say you're welcome and would be happy to get out of your hair," Peter smiles back. "Dames," he adds at the end.

Damian looks down and smirks, "I like you Peter."

"Sorry, I can't say the same for you," Peter winces apologetically, and someone from across the room snorts. Damian glares over his shoulder and Peter winks, "At least someone appreciates my sense of humor."

"Your jokes won't last, I hope you know that," the man says harshly, his eyes sparking with anger for the first time.

"I look forward to proving you wrong," Peter tilts his head cockily.

Damian puts his head down and nods, shoving his hands in his pockets, "You see, Peter...I like to take my time-

"That's what she said," Peter snorts loudly and Damian trails off. Peter frowns, wincing in mockery and whispering an apologetic, "Sorry, did I interrupt? I couldn't help myself. But let me cut to the chase for ya," he sets his jaw and speaks through gritted teeth. "You're name's Damian, I got that. Now what do you want?"

Damian looks around at the people watching in shock, pointing at Peter, "Did he just- he did, right? You all heard that? He interrupted me?"

"Sorry, was that against the rules?" Peter spoke up. The hit came faster than he was expecting, actually breaking skin right across his cheekbone. He flicked hair out of his face as he brought his head back and flexed his jaw, giving the man a nod, "Nice one."

He stuck his finger in Peter's face and snarled, "Don't interrupt me ag-"

"What?" Peter asked innocently, a grin slowly forming on his face.

"Well...I think we've got a class clown," Damian announced to the room, a few men snickering.

"I was always more the quiet nerd. I just give people who kidnap me and tie me to a chair special treatment," Peter assured him. Damian smirks, and then punches him hard in the stomach without warning. Peter slumps forward with a groan, coughing as he doubles over to nurse his stinging ribs. Peter coughs, wincing in pain and spitting up blood.

"You got blood on my shoes," Damian sighed, dragging his foot against the ground.

Peter looked up and licked his lips, "Oh, I'm so sorry. That won't wash out, will it? My bad." Damian's look darkened and Peter winced as he sat up straight, "Well this is fun, want to tell me who you're working for and what you want now?"

"So anxious," Damian said, a smile growing on his face as he crossed his arms.

"Well when someone knocks me out and takes me to a crappy warehouse, I'd like to know who it is," Peter smiles fakely. "Because if you wanted to borrow my LEGO collection, you could have just asked."

"All in due time," Damian assures him, patting him on his cheek.

Peter jerks away from his touch and narrows his eyes, "You're a cocky bastard, aren't you?"

"I have a system," Damian makes a face. "And it always works."

Peter adjusts his position in the chair and looks around, "Oooo, is there some trial I have to pass? Where's the start button, I'm in."

Damian smiles before he grabs Peter's collar and yanks him out of the chair. Peter sucks in a tight breath through a flinch as his feet skip against the ground, scrambling to regain his footing. His legs are still a little numb but he manages to stand eventually before he considers kneeing the guy

in the chest while he gets the chance.

"You're gonna take a walk. Don't even think about doing anything stupid," the man warns, tightening his grip on Peter's collar as he warily glances at him. Peter's legs which are locked and tense.

"Am I that transparent?" Peter grins.

"Whatever you do to me, I will do two times worse," Damian snarls, starting to drag Peter forward.

"Noted," Peter sighs before he sticks out his foot, putting all his energy into driving his knee into the man's stomach. Damian snarls, dropping his hold on him and clutching his stomach. Peter staggers on his own and grins, leaning towards him, "Woah, you're human? I couldn't tell because you don't have a soul-"

Damian slams his elbow into Peter's head before kicking him in the leg to knock him to the ground. Peter yelps and falls, landing hard on side, "That was like three times worse, I think that's a red card-"

He feels a hand fist his shirt and another grab his shoulder as two men yank him to his feet. Peter does a double take and blinks to sharpen his vision, his head whipping back and forth, but his mind wasn't playing tricks on him.

It's the two men who came in suits to ask him about the phone. Thoughts run through his head about how he's gonna get out of this, since no one knows where he was. His phone was broken because Damian slammed into him, and since the two men were working for him, they've obviously done some tapping in any GPS system- May. His stomach churns and Peter's fists curl behind him as he looks between the two men but then he feels a harsh yank on his hair and his gaze is directed front and center.

"Don't try me," Damian hisses, his eyes flashing.

"Buddy, I don't follow directions well," Peter snarls back, getting face to face with him. "I'm a teenager. You tell me to do something? I'll do the exact opposite."

"I admire your grit, Peter. Unfortunately, I know what makes you squirm, since you're the friendly neighborhood Spidey and all," he says, grabbing Peter's chin so hard he feels his skin bruise.

"Well you went 0 to 60 in a few seconds," Peter says, wiggling his eyebrows as he tries to wrench out of the man's grip.

Damian looks down, smiling before he harshly shoves Peter's chin away. "I'll see you in a bit." His gaze his cold and the men's grip on Peter's arms tighten, starting to force him towards the door, Damian backing away as he straightens his shirt, "They say the best torture techniques don't come from pain, Peter. Not physical at least. We'll have our fun, don't worry. But first I've got to give you a little time to get used to the place," he calls.

Peter struggles to turn his head and keep him in sight as he's forced through the doorway and into the hall. "In other words, you like to play with your food?" he yells before his head is shoved forward and he's shuffled down the hallway. They reach the end and open the door, shoving him forward. It's a small room, draped with shadows and cold and Peter grins, turning around slowly with a cocky smirk, "Look, guys, I hate to break it to you, but I'm not afraid of the dark-"

The first snaps across his jaw and Peter's head whips to the side with a stifled cry. He's pushed

harshly into a chair in the center of the room. His cuffs clamp in at the back. The man goes over to the side and he turns a lever.

"Is that for the confetti?" Peter asks with a grin.

"You wish," the man snorts.

He suddenly he feels a small drop on his head, and he leans to the side and looks up, more drops hitting his shoulder, as the slow trickle of water hits him, icy cold. It drips down his back and Peter flinches, already getting cold. It's like when you turn a sink on just enough that the drops are separated and steady, but not enough for it to be a stream. Some of his bangs stick to his forehead and Peter shifts uncomfortably as the men check his bonds.

"Nice, really nice. Four star hotel, practically. I really like what you've done with the place. If I could get some towels by any chance, that would be nice." he asks the men. They both laugh and Peter looks around the room, moving his head to the side so the drops falls on his shoulder instead. "Dark room and a leaky ceiling? This is what's gonna break me? You've got to be kidding."

One of the men turns around and gives him a smirk, but doesn't say anything. He just shuts the door, leaving Peter in darkness. He kicks his feet around and sighs, still a little drowsy. Peter eventually gives up trying to avoid the water dripping above his head and he lets it fall down his face, taking deep breaths as his clothes slowly get damp. Eventually, it trickles down his legs and soaks into his shoes. Peter makes a face and moves his toes around in uncomfort.

I can handle this, he thinks, twisting his hands in the cuffs again. This wasn't too bad. Peter settles in his chair, taking a deep breath. Then out of nowhere, a very high pitched ringing hits his ears. Peter winces, jumping in the chair as he flinches, cursing and looking around for the origin. He can't find it in the shadows but he's sure there's some sort of speaker. The hairs on the back of his neck stand up as the loud sound shocks all of his senses, and the water temperature isn't helping-giving him chills.

The volume continues to raise and Peter lets out a cry of pain, pushing his ear against his shoulder and squeezing his eyes shut, drops running off his lashes. The ringing gets louder and louder until he can feel his jaw resonating, his ear drums thumping in his head. Peter grits his teeth and his chin falls to his chest, water still running down his back, making him start to shiver. The noise finally levels out, Peter letting out a small whimper. He can't tell if it stopped because his ears are still ringing, but then it dies down enough for Peter to catch his breath.

The water hasn't stopped, and Peter shivers slightly. He had never been a fan of the cold. Or being kidnapped for that matter, but it had never really happened before. He didn't count the one time he was tied up in an abandoned warehouse in their surprise attack gone wrong, because Tony had stormed in a second later and blasted all the men into next year. Tony. Peter almost scoffed that he could even consider the possibility of him saving the day.

He had to do this one himself. Ned would surely tell someone, and that would put him in danger. Peter couldn't let these men hurt his friends, or his Aunt, who they must be keeping under tabs. Peter curses; they were probably sending her emails under his name to keep her out of the loop. He couldn't let it go further than that. Damian hadn't mentioned anything about May, or future plans, so Peter had a while to figure things out and get himself out of this mess. Hopefully he could.

He could start by getting out of these cuffs.

Tony crumpled up a piece of paper in his hand and tossed it in the trash. It bounced off the lid and he stared at it, before he got up and bent down with a hand on his knee to return it to the trashcan. Straightening, he grabbed his day old coffee, gulping it down. Setting the cup back on the coaster, he spun his wrench on his finger and made his way through the lab, pushing the 3D screens to the side.

"So this one goes here, then?" the kid said slowly.

Tony stopped walking and he turned around, seeing himself and Peter at the far end of the lab, fixing their first suit. Tony had a smile on his face as he bounced the screwdriver in his hand and nodded. "Yeah, and then click that in place to attach the connector."

"Stable," Peter reports, pulling over the nearest screen to monitor the levels.

Tony nods and hands him another tool and Peter tinkers for a bit before he wipes his hands slowly and looks back at Tony for approval. The man winks and clasps his shoulder, exclaiming, "Couldn't have done it better myself. See, look at you. Quick learner. I'm impressed."

Peter grinned and tossed him the fixed blaster and Tony locked it in place, before stepping back and putting his arm around Peter's shoulders. "Congratulations Mr. Parker. You just made your own Iron Man suit."

"Heck yeah we did. Blueberry?" Peter grinned happily, handing over the pack of snacks, his right hand twirling a wrench.

Tony looks down as the memory fades and he goes to make another cup of coffee.

"Sir, how much sleep did you get?"

"Eleven," Tony responds dryly, rubbing his eye. He dumps one more cup of coffee grounds than suggested just for good measure. "Minutes," he adds.

"That's not healthy," FRIDAY says slowly.

"The coffee or the sleep?" Tony smirks without humor.

"Both."

Tony shrugs and gives a groggy curl of his lip, "Sue me."

"Tony...it's been three months."

Tony slams his fist down on the counter. "You don't think I know that, FRIDAY? You don't think I've been well aware of every single day that's gone by?"

"So then maybe it's time to-"

"To what?" Tony asks, spreading his arms. "Look, I went back there, to try and fix things- to see if he wanted to try and fix things but-" Tony falters and shakes his head. "FRIDAY, if you could have seen the hate in his eyes-"

"Maybe you're mistaking pain for hate?"

Tony gives a sad smile, "I wish I was. But we are on two separate pages. He said he was fine without me. He didn't even blink." Tony sighed and shoved the cup into the coffee maker with trembling hands. "There was no hesitation, FRIDAY. None. He wanted me gone, and I don't blame

him. And now it's too late to go back. So what am I gonna do? I'm gonna get eleven minutes of sleep-" Tony stumbles against the counter and blinks to clear his blurry vision, pointing generally towards the coffee maker, "I'm gonna drink my coffee, and I'm gonna fix a thing or two in this lab."

Suddenly Tony's phone rings and he looks over with a sigh, rubbing a hand over his face. It's probably one of the Avengers, calling to remind him about a meeting. Tony walks over, yawns, and just shoves it to his ear without looking at the name.

"Hello?" he sighs.

"Thank God, I'm so glad this is still your number. Hi...sir...Mr. Stark?"

Tony's brow furrows and he hesitantly asks, "Who is this?"

"My name is Ned? Ned Leeds?" the boy says nervously, stuttering, *"I-I'm one of Peter's friends? I only have your number because of that one time when Peter was doing that really stupid thing and he told me to call you and I saved the contact-"*

"Ok, ok, I get the point," Tony presses a hand to his forehead. "Why are you calling? Does Peter know you're calling me?"

"No, sir," he says slowly.

Tony scoffs, turning around as his coffee starts to brew. "Then I would check with him first, Ned, cause I don't think he would want you talking to me."

"I can't," the boy blurts out.

Tony stops and makes a face, "What do you mean you can't?"

"I mean I haven't heard from him in a week," Ned says firmly.

Tony's head snaps up in alert, his eyes widening, suddenly awake. His vision sharpens and he straightens, speaking harshly into the phone. "What?"

Peter couldn't get out of the cuffs. Obviously. Because he was still in this hell hole. And man, did Damian know how to piss him off. He hadn't seen him since they first met, which made Peter nervous. His best advantage was talking, and he wasn't even given the opportunity to. Peter was preparing for any situation, whether that was torture, or interrogation, or *something*. As long as it was *something*. It seemed Damian knew that and gave him the opposite. Peter had been stuck in that room for six days, food periodically, although he had a feeling that was switched up to mess with him.

The worst part was that Peter hadn't slept, because every time his head nodded to his chest, the noise would blare from the speakers, making Peter squirm and flinch in pain. Six days straight of being awake was starting to take a toll. Peter's eyelids fluttered and his head dropped to his chest. He flinched with the harsh sound that snapped him awake again and he took a gulping breath, licking his chapped lips. Then he felt a drop on his head and Peter steeled himself as the cold stream started up again, making him writhe in pain as the water trickled down his back and soaked his crusted shirt. Peter was already shivering, barely able to clench his hands behind him. With minimal food, and water only when he took the "showers" as he liked to call them, he was getting weaker. If Damian wanted him roughed up, he knew exactly how to do it: by depriving Peter of

even the chance to gain the upper hand, he dominated this game.

Even when the men came in and Peter insulted them enough that they would make eye contact, they never talked, they just threw punches and by day 6...he was almost grateful for the pain and the relief of actually feeling something. He was only released from the chair once a day, if that, and it wasn't much, just thrown to the floor when he was given food. His limbs were beginning to be numb.

Day six, he guessed his anger was showing more than usual, because that's when they decided to take him out of his cell.

"Guys, if I wanted a shower, I would have taken one-"

"I hate to be the one to break this to you, but Tony and I are done. We haven't talked in...a very, very long time."

The man is set back on his heels, defeated but trying not to show it. He narrows his eyes at Peter and looks around at other people's expressions, as if considering the fact that Peter is lying.

Peter makes a face, "Aw, come on. You guys don't believe me, I can tell. But think about it. He's not looking for me, did that ever occur to you? The only logical explanation to why, is because we're not the super tight, batman and robin duo we once were. Whatever you want to call it, it happened. Falling out, huge fight, blah, blah, blah. Main kicker is that we're on a no contact, 'I don't want anything to do with you' policy for....ever. I'm nothing to him and vice versa. So...yeah. Sorry to burst your cute little HYDRA bubbles."

There's silence in the room and Peter snorts, looking around. He wiggles his eyebrows and sinks into the chair with a cocky smirk. "This is defiantly not how you envisioned this would go, is it?"

"No," Damian admits. "It isn't." He doesn't spend much time sulking. His gaze is on Peter again and he points at him, "I'm also very surprised at how fast you've rebounded. You didn't look too good in your cell but now you're sprouting sarcastic one liners like it was nothing."

"First off, you were watching me? Creepy. So I take it you got the curse words I sent you then. Those were directed to you by the way," Peter informed him with a wink. He shrugs, "Second, you said it best: I'm full of surprises."

"Right you are," Damian nodded.

"Now, are we done with all the formalities? Because I didn't ask for a shower, but I got one- very kind of you, by the way," Peter adds before shrugging. "Or are you still not talking to me and you're gonna leave me home alone for another week? I can't believe missed the interaction with someone I don't even know."

Damian smiled and crossed his arms, "They say that sleep deprivation is one of the most intense forms of torture."

"Yeah, and the Chinese water drip too? I saw it on mythbusters," Peter sneered. "And I appreciate the boldness, but unfortunately, I don't think it was your first move. I think you were waiting for people to come looking, because you haven't done your homework. Then when no one came you improvised, putting me on the back burner..." Peter cocked his head and snarled, "Which I don't appreciate."

Damian smirked, "You're good, kid. I'll give you that. I'll also give you the Tony Stark curve ball. But I don't quite trust you on that yet-"

"Tony can rot in hell," Peter announced firmly, holding back a wince. He straightened in the chair and raised an eyebrow, "You believe me now?"

"Unfortunately no," Damian winced, walking over and crouching in front of Peter. "You could be saying that to keep him safe, to convince me he means nothing to you."

"Keep dreaming," Peter swore firmly, yanking on his cuffs with what little strength was returning to him. "Do you want me to tell you a story?" he snarls. "Do you want to sit criss cross apple sauce in a freaking circle and I'll tell you how the bridges burned? We'll go through boxes of tissues together, we'll laugh, we'll cry, and then maybe break out some chick flicks and-"

Damian backhands Peter across the face before he can mention the Notebook or start naming Meg Ryan movies. He flicks wet hair out of his eyes and licks the cut on his lip as the man sighs, "I didn't ask for the sass, Peter."

"Oh, but you got it anyway!" Peter exclaimed. "For free! How do you like that-"

Damian slams his fist into Peter's stomach and he coughs, groaning, "Yeah, that's the sweet spot." Damian scoffs and Peter looks up weakly, his gaze flicking around the room, trying to find some indication of where he is. He croaks, "So I'm bait, huh? For a man that doesn't even care that I exist anymore? Is that the only plan HYDRA came up with-"

"Bait?" Damian laughed. "No, no. Peter, first off, I'd like to get one thing straight. We're not HYDRA."

Peter does a double take but masks it with a snort, "Oh, so you're like the rip off version, then. So like a dumber snake, like one of those tiny ones that isn't poisonous?"

Damian laughs at that, "You're very entertaining, I'll give you that much. And I'm honored that's what your first thought was. HYDRA? That must mean we're professional."

"No, you misunderstood," Peter laughs. "It means you're evil lunatics."

Damian sighs, "Evil is based primarily on perspective, kid."

"Exactly what a bad guy would say- are you hearing yourself?" Peter asks.

"We're.....freelancers," Damian says, pointing at Peter. "We know people who want you dead, we know you're Spiderman, which I'm dying to learn more about by the way, and that even if you and Stark aren't best buds anymore, you still know things. So why should I throw away a perfectly good opportunity?"

"Because you're a good person- oh wait," Peter laughed and killed his smile. "My mistake." Peter was faking this, hard. Because he knew sooner or later, Ned would call someone if he couldn't get a hold of May, or May would become suspicious and call someone- who was to say these guys wouldn't just kill them both just because? They seemed pretty confident that Peter wouldn't be found by someone putting out a search for a missing kid, but they didn't know that Ned wouldn't stop until he found him, and same with May if she ever figured it out. Whatever these men wanted, Peter wouldn't give to him, but he just hoped they would keep it solely around him, and not involve his friends or family.

"I said it once and I'll say it again," Damian clapped his hand on Peter's knee with a huge grin, "I like you!"

Peter rolled his eyes, "I'm flattered."

Damian stares at him for a second before he presses on Peter's knee to help himself stand up and claps his hands, nodding, "Well...good talk. I'll see you in a bit."

Peter sighs, twisting his hands in his cuffs and yelling, "Hey! That's it?"

Damian turns around and smiles, spreading his hands, "Well maybe you're right, Peter. Like you said, no one is coming for you. So I really do have all the time in the world. So I'm in no rush. Why, is there somewhere you'd like to be?" he asks innocently, giving Peter a wink and a small wave as he heads for the door.

"Screw you," Peter calls after him furiously.

Damian turns to the two guards at the door and nods his head towards the kid, "Go have a little fun with him." He walks out and goes down the hall, stepping into the room and sinking in the chair with a sigh. After a sip from the coffee cup he rolls his chair over to the side, next to his companion who is typing on the computer.

"Do you believe him, Rich?" Damian asks him, keeping his gaze on the monitor. Peter took a slug in the stomach without even letting out a cry of pain.

"I-I'm not sure, sir," he responds slowly. "He seems capable of lying, but...it's convincing."

Damian nods thoughtfully. He points, "Ok, here's what we're gonna do. Send another email to his aunt under Peter's account, make up something about paperwork and the phone activation not working. I don't want to bring her into this until later, to spice things up. Keep the kid worried."

"Another thing, sir," Richard interrupts. "We got an email from what appears to be one of Peter's friends? He contacted Peter's aunt because he was growing suspicious. Should we eliminate him?"

Damian's head snaps to the side and he pulls out a gun, leveling it at Richard's head who flinches. "No, we are not going to eliminate a high schooler because his best friend didn't show up for the chem test, do you want to expose us? We're not heartless. Respond back that you've heard from him and he's sick and wishes to not be disturbed, something like that. Understand?" he asks through his teeth. The man nods and shakily starts typing.

Damian sighs and puts the gun away, "Unbelievable. Ok, now before you made me question why I hired you, where were we?"

"T-ony Stark, sir," Rich gulps.

Damian leans back in his chair and smiles, sighing, "Stark. Right. Well, let's mess with Peter a bit. You have that voice software we've been cooking up?" The man nods and Damian grins, raising an eyebrow, "Perfect. I think Tony should send Peter a voicemail, don't you?"

Richard slowly nods, "And I could monitor his vitals when we show it to him, to see if he's lying. Very clever sir."

"I know it is," Damian sniffs, kicking his feet up on the table. He rubs his hands and then pats Rich's shoulder, "And remember, it should hurt your very soul, maybe even make you shed a few tears. If Peter is telling the truth about Stark...I want to know. So I'm gonna rough him up a little, he seems very uptight. And as for Stark...you still have Peter's GPS intact and frozen, right?"

"Yes sir, we stabilized it before his phone broke so there was no suspicious activity," he nods.

Damian smiled, "Unblock it. Strip our tech."

"Pardon?" Richard stutters.

Damian shrugs, "If he's right, Tony won't care. But if he starts to take action, we may have another target in our reach and I know exactly what to do."

"S-sir?" Rich says softly, disbelief written plainly in his blind eyes.

"Look, it can only go in our favor," Damian shrugs, resting his elbows on his knees. "If Tony and him really fell out, then there will be no action on his part and we know we're clear. But if I'm right and he's lying...We've got enough jammers that are rerouting our servers that Stark could never pinpoint the exact location even if he wanted to. So if he does start to look for the kid, I imagine he will do it alone, and we can lead him here."

"You're talking about kidnapping...Tony Stark?" Richard concludes hesitantly.

"I was never one for limits," Damian announces, leaning back in his chair with a smile on his face.

"Ned, talk to me, right now," Tony says firmly, standing up and nervously pacing the room.

"Well, at first I thought he was sick, because he didn't show up at school, and he broke his phone so I gave it a couple of days, because most sicknesses last at least four days until you're fully recovered- five it's serious and you know there is something going around," Ned laughed without humor and Tony bit back a curse at how worried the kid sounded. *"Anyway, so then I emailed his aunt who's on a trip right now and my email didn't even go through. I've spent the last day contacting everyone I know and no one has seen him, ok? So...so I thought you might have."*

"No...no I haven't in-" Tony lowered his head and cleared his throat, "in a long time. When was the last time you heard from him?"

"Six days ago. He facetimed me and then broke his phone not even an hour later," Ned said. *"Some guy ran into him on a bike. He called me from his apartment lobby phone and said he'd see me at school, and then he never did."*

"Have you checked his apartment?" Tony asked.

"No, not yet. I was going to today after I called you because I couldn't wait anymore-"

"No," Tony said instantly. "Don't- I'll go, okay? I'll go, just stay put," he said, pressing a hand to his head. If something was wrong, Peter wouldn't be at his apartment. The place would probably be bugged or watched in case anyone came snooping, and Tony didn't want an innocent teenager involved.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I mean if he's sick, which he probably is," Tony assured him unconvincingly before cracking a smile, "then he'll defiantly want to see me, right?" He laughed weakly, running a shaky hand through his hair.

Ned hesitated and then asked, *"I know you guys aren't talking, or hate each other, I don't know- I just know that something bad happened, and I thought I would call because-"*

"You did the right thing, Ned. Thank you for calling," Tony said sincerely, his voice cracking.

"What happened between you two? " Ned asked, *"Peter's been really...he hasn't been okay for three months. I've never seen him like this before,"* Ned said quietly.

Tony looked down, his hand curling into a fist as he took a shaky breath, squeezing his eyes shut and whispering a curse. He didn't answer, he only knew he had definitely screwed up. Clearing his throat he asked, "Did anything else happen, Ned?"

"Well like I said I sent the email to May but it didn't go through- wait- I just got an email back...that's weird."

"Are you sure it didn't go through the first time?" Tony asked.

"Yeah, I got an email and everything saying that there was something up with the server. But now...I just got a reply. It seems legit."

"And it's from May?" Tony clarified.

"Y-yeah. She says she's talking to Peter on email and that he's sick. She says I can email him if I want but he won't have his new phone for a while and he's pretty contagious so don't come over."

Tony frowned and went over to his computer, logging in, his fingers flying across the keyboard. He set down the phone and turned it on speaker, asking, "Do me a favor, what's your email?"

Tony typed in the email Ned gave him and then the kid stuttered, *"Did you just- did Tony Stark just hack into my-"*

"Yes he did," Tony said absentmindedly, typing a few things in and searching for the origination of May's email. A new screen popped up with a beeping light as the signal trace started to cross the Atlantic and landed somewhere in Africa. Tony sighed in relief. "Well, it checks out- wait-" Tony's gaze snapped back to the computer as the small line rebounded, heading back to the East Coast and bouncing around New York. "What the heck?" Tony cursed, zooming in and trying to get a lock. "FRIDAY, pinpoint it will ya?"

"I'm trying," FRIDAY responded, and her voice sounded frustrated.

"What? What's wrong?" Ned asked worriedly.

"Tony- I...I can't get a trace on this," FRIDAY said in disbelief.

"Ned, email Peter," Tony requested immediately, his fists curling and eyes narrowing.

"What?"

"I don't care what you say in it, just email Peter. Ask some questions. Don't make it suspicious," Tony instructed, working to get a signal trace. His fingers fly and his eyes flick across the screen as he tries to explain, "Someone is using jammers. The first trace is what would show up on any normal scanner, and it leads to where I'm guessing where May is for her trip. But that's just a scam. The real trace then loops back to the US, somewhere in New York but they're not using a concrete connector or signal connection."

"Oh crap, they're probably bouncing between satellites. Peter and I did that in school once when we wanted to look up some private records? Anyone can do it and since it's not sophisticated, it's impossible to crack."

Tony makes a face in surprise and then remembers that this is Peter's best friend, so of course he's smart. He nods, "Exactly. That email didn't come from May, and I don't think the response you're gonna get is gonna come from Peter, either."

"Do you think he's ok?" Ned asked worriedly.

"He better be," Tony snarled.

"Who do you think has him?"

"A dead man walking," Tony said firmly, turning off the computer and going over to the other computer. "FRIDAY, check Peter's GPS. He broke his phone, it shouldn't have been active for the past six days, but I didn't get an alert so I need answers."

"Sir, it was just turned on 11 seconds ago," FRIDAY said slowly. *"It's been off before that."*

"They froze it," Tony cursed, slamming his hand down on the table. "They've had him for six days and I didn't even know about it. They're dead. I'm going to kill every single one of them," he snarls furiously, his vision turning red. "If he's so much as scratched- six freaking days god-" Tony knocks off a folder and the papers spill to the floor. He's shaking in anger, his chest closing like he's about to have a panic attack. He tugs at his hair and mutters, "Kid- this is my fault-"

"Are- are you okay sir?" Ned asks cautiously.

Tony runs a hand over his face and forces composure. He takes a deep breath, "Whoever they are, they've had him for almost a week and I didn't even know. I didn't even..."

"Well they locked the GPS, you wouldn't have known," Ned mumbled, although he knew it wouldn't make a difference.

"But why turn it on now?" Tony wondered to himself. He shook his head and spoke into the phone, "Look, I'll take care of this. When you get the email back from them-"

"I just got it," Ned said quietly. Tony froze with the phone against his ear.

"Does it sound like Peter?" He asked urgently. Hoping, praying, even though he knew what the kid was going to say.

"No," Ned whispered. *"It's not him, Tony. I know my best friend."*

"I know you do," Tony cursed, pressing a hand to his temple. "Ok, look," he said breathlessly as he grabbed his coat and blaster for good measure, keeping his computers on. Then he opens the lower cabinet and slips a gun into the back of jeans too, in case of technical emergencies. Why does he have the feeling he's walking into a trap? He feels like he should ask someone else to be in on his with him, but then maybe the people who were waiting for him would abort. He can't risk losing Peter. He know's he's probably sealing his death warrant, but he doesn't even care.

"You need to email him back like you think it's Peter, tell him that you're in trouble with your mom and she took away your electronics so you won't be emailing him. Tell him to call when he gets his phone back and you hope he feels better and then talk about Star Wars or something, make it believable like you have no idea what's going on. Then cut off contact."

"Okay- okay, I can do that. What about you?" Ned asked after taking a deep breath.

"I'm going to Peter's apartment," Tony said, walking out the door of the lab and making his way

down the hall. Plan B, you know you need one Tony, he thought. Cursing he hit a few buttons on his phone and then spoke again, "If I don't contact you today, something happened and I need you to call Steve Rogers."

"Uh- I- I don't have Captain America's number," Ned spluttered.

"It's already uploaded into your contacts," Tony said.

"Oh," Ned stuttered, "Okay. What if he doesn't answer?"

"Rhodes. I gave you his number too. Just keep calling them until they answer. Tell them to go in their lab, talk them through everything and once they know the situation, you cut contact off from them too, you understand? Let them handle it, I do not want you involved in this," Tony said firmly. "Ned, is that clear?"

"Yeah, yeah okay," Ned responded quickly before hesitating. Tony was about to hang up as he ran down the stairs to the garage before the teen suddenly blurted out, "Look, just so you know, Peter thought you didn't care about him anymore and it tore him apart. These last three months have been really bad for him. But...but I can tell I only got one side of the story, and I didn't even get the full story cause I have no idea what happened..." Ned paused, as if waiting for Tony to cut him off and defend himself, which he didn't. "I just know that you do care about him. So whatever is going on between you two, when you find him, fix it. Because it's screwing you both up."

Tony raised his eyebrows at the kid's boldness. "Who made you my therapist?"

"No- no one, sir, I just-" Ned trailed off.

Tony smirked slightly, "It's okay, kid. You're right. I made a mistake and I hurt the kid and...and I'll fix it. Thank you, Ned. I may ask you to come work for me someday."

Ned choked on the other line and squeaked, "That would be- just find my best friend, okay?"

"I will, I promise," Tony said, before he hung up and got into his car. Tony tossed the phone into the passengers seat and didn't even bother to put on his seat belt. He had taken the route off his GPS but still had it memorized and he spun the wheel hard, before flooring his foot on the gas.

Richard pressed the call button and Damian's earpiece buzzed. He lowered his fist which was about to land another blow and Peter gulped down a shaky breath, managing a grin as blood dripped down his chin, "What, you tired?"

Scrunching up his nose, Damian released his grip on the teen's hair and let his head slump to his chest, Peter coughing up blood.

"No, something just came up," he said simply, wiping his hand on Peter's shirt and then slipping out of the room. The door closed behind him and he walked down the hall, entering the tech room which was the last door on the left. "There better be a good reason of why you interrupted me. I think Peter and I were finally getting along-"

"Stark took the bait. He's heading to the apartment," Richard said, looking over his shoulder. "And Peter's friend dropped the lead. Apparently his mom got mad at him and took away his electronics. He believes the lie that the kid is sick. He's off the chess board."

"All good news!" Damian exclaimed before he pointed and clarified, "And the note is planted?"

And you made sure he copied Peter's handwriting from the chemistry notes?"

"Yes, but sir, I don't know if that's such a good idea- wouldn't it deter-" Richard said hesitantly.

"If Stark cares about the kid at all, no it will not deter him, it will simply wound him, which will give us an opportunity to catch him off guard and spice things up for the big reunion," Damian says, his gaze fierce as he paces the room. He points at Richard and raises an eyebrow, "Having Tony Stark is a bonus. Obviously after we're done with Peter we'll hand him over to HYDRA...maybe. That's if he's in good enough shape because remember he's got some requests from visitors."

"They're awaiting our invite," Rich confirmed.

Damian nodded, before making a face, "Or I'll just kill him, I haven't decided yet. That's too far in the future. I know HYDRA wants to do some experiments on him because his powers and all that what not, which is almost worse than killing him, so I would be doing him a favor," Damian said thoughtfully. Then he held out his other hand, "Tony Stark though, unlimited possibilities. I mean we all hate the guy, we could request a ransom, we could kill him, we could get nuclear codes if we asked nicely...especially if we have the kid."

"That's assuming Peter is lying and that they didn't have a huge fall out," Richard reminds him.

"Well I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," Damian sighed, cracking his knuckles aimlessly before exclaiming, "Oh! On another note, the jammers are in place, and the team is on stand by?" Rich nodded firmly and Damian clasped his hands, letting out a satisfied sigh, "See...was this all so hard? No. I'd say it's going very smoothly."

"Well we've still got some ways to go-" Richard stuttered.

Damian glared at him, "Let's stay positive. You got the voicemail ready?"

Rich nodded and reached over, handing him a phone after unhooking it from the nearest computer. "Just push the middle button and it will play."

Damian took the phone and ran his thumb over the smooth edge. His eyes flashed and he grinned, heading for the door, "Thanks Rich. Let's have some fun."

Peter spit out blood, taking a deep breath that rattled in his lungs. He raised his head again and smirked, "Hey, you punch harder than Dames, I'll give you that much." The man wound up for another hit and Peter braced, squeezing his eyes shut when the door opened. The hit never came and Peter squinted as the men stepped back and Damian walked across the room, holding something in his hand.

He grabbed a chair from the side and pulled it across the room. The metal skipped and screeched along the ground and Peter winced as his ears rang from the high pitched sound it made. He set it right in front of Peter and sat down, holding up what looked like a cell phone. A really crappy cell phone.

"You win that in one of those claw machines?" Peter asked drowsily, vaguely swaying from dizziness combine by lack of sleep and getting his head rocked for the past hour. His entire face was swollen, and Peter didn't even want to know what he looked like. The pain had numbed but was still constant. He motioned his head forward, "You gonna tell me what that is or do I get another guess?"

Damian smiled and turned on the phone, "We've been watching you for a while, Peter. We tapped into your phone recently and this came up. When you told us that you and Tony had a little falling out, I decided to check if there were any missed messages from blocked callers. And there was. An untraceable, unknown number came up and guess who it was? Tony Stark. He wanted to say hi. I thought you would want to hear what he had to say."

"Well you thought wrong," Peter snarled. There was no way this was true. This had to be a trick. They probably spliced clips of Tony speaking together or something- either way he wanted nothing to do with this. Peter steeled himself and sat straighter in his chair, desperately trying to keep up the act. "I don't want anything to do with that piece of-

"I think you do," Damian winced and he pressed a button on the phone, putting it to Peter's ear. Peter immediately jerked his head away and Damian stood with a sigh, going behind him and gripping his chin forcefully so that he couldn't move his head. Then he pressed the phone against Peter's ear firmly. "Let's try this again."

Peter grit his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut, trying to make his ears ring on command. Then he hears Tony's voice on the phone and all his fight leaves him. He goes limp and holds his breath, listening in disbelief.

"I know you blocked my phone. So I know you'll never hear this. So I'm gonna say what I wish I could have said when we last saw each other."

Peter sucked in a breath, tears coming to his eyes, staring straight ahead as Damian pressed the phone harder into his ear and tightened his grip on his chin.

"You are pathetic, impulsive, and in way over your head."

Peter physically recoiled, choking on his next breath. A lump formed in his throat and he caught the sob that tried to break free.

"I'm glad we went our separate ways. Frankly, it was about time, don't you think?"

Peter struggled desperately in Damian's grip, desperately trying to break out before the tears came. He could feel them burning, and he let out a small whimper as he jerked to the side, trying anything just to get that phone away from his ear and Tony's voice out of his head. He freaking *whimpered*.

"And I just want you to know that I am fine without you. The minute we split I felt this huge weight just lifted off my shoulders and i realized that's all you were. A weight. Baggage."

Peter furiously shook his head back and forth as much as he could, holding back a sob as tears streamed down his face. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't think. He could barely see. He was shaking in Damian's grip and he finally choked down a desperately needed breath, something in his chest squeezing so hard that he couldn't move.

"And you know what? I'm gonna say it. I wish we had never met."

click

That breaks him. Peter stops fighting. He just goes limp, blinking through tears of disbelief. His spine physically aches and as Damian lets go of his chin, Peter's head slumps to his chest, his shoulders shaking. Tears stream down his cheeks, his lungs tight and burning as he gulps down air. His head feels like it's going to explode and his ears ring, echoing with Tony's words. He digs his chin into his chest, squeezing his eyes shut and biting his lip hard, clenching his hands behind

him.

"I'm sorry, Peter. I just thought you would want to know the truth," Damian said quietly.

Peter looked up in hate, his bangs stuck to his forehead from sweat, not even able to take a full breath. "Screw you."

"I'll leave you alone," Damian said, returning the chair to the side and signalling his men to follow him out the door.

Peter waited until it closed to exhale. His breath was shaky and it caught in his throat as it turned into a sob. Every tear he had held back in the past three months let loose and Peter slumped in his seat, head hanging in defeat. A remainder of what he had left to hold onto was shattered; Peter felt like the life preserver had just been snatched out beneath him. He felt like he was drowning.

The lights turned off and Peter was left in the dark with shaking shoulders, blood dripping from his hands at how hard he was clenching them.

Tony slowly made his way up the steps, remembering the last time he had been here. He passed the stair that he had sat on for the next hour and a half with his head in his hands, debating whether or not he should go back up and knock on the door for one last attempt. Ultimately he had decided against it, and that was the wrong move.

He reached the landing and pulled open the door, checking down the hallway before leveling his blaster. It was about 6 pm, so everyone was inside their apartments for the most part after a long day. Tony walked down the hall, careful of the spots that creaked as to not alert his presence to anyone. He stopped by Peter's door and considered knocking softly, in case this was all a misunderstanding and Peter would show up with tired eyes and a shocked expression, demanding why he was here. As much as he wished that would happen, he knew he had to put his hopefulness aside. He pulled a lock pick out of his pocket and easily picked it, entering the room.

He closed the door and it let out a creak and Tony winced, shutting it all the way and looking around the empty apartment. He held up his blaster and a light flickered on in the middle, shining across the living room.

Licking his lips, he whispered, "Pete?"

Nothing.

Moving forward, he pushed open the door to the bathroom, entering and whipping to the sides. Tony backed out and continued down the hallway, stopping in front of Peter's room. He bit his lip and pushed the door open, shining the light in, palm up. It was empty. Tony lowered his hand and checked his closet before doing a full circle and muttering a curse. He walked over to Peter's desk and looked through the drawers to see if there was anything Peter had left behind, any clues to where he was-

Tony's gaze fell on a picture, shoved in the back of his drawer. He couldn't reach it unless he took out all of the books but he knew what it was, and where it was taken. Heartbroken, Tony took a deep breath and slowly closed the drawer, standing up and gripping the desk with white knuckles.

"Kid, I'm so sorry," he whispered to the empty room. "I'm gonna fix this, okay? I'm gonna-" He was about to stride out the door before he saw a piece of paper tacked on the board by Peter's desk.

Tony's brow furrowed and he cautiously made his way over to it; his name was scrawled on the front. It was folded up and Tony ripped it off, unfolding it slowly, his eyes landing on the note meant for him.

I'm never gonna give this to you. Because I never want to see you again. But if I did...I have two words to say to you. Well more than that. A lot more actually. But I think the first two that come to mind would be screw you. Yeah, mature of me, I don't really care at this point. You can do whatever you want to make up for what happened, but none of it will work. I will never forgive you. Ever. You're selfish. You don't care about me. You never did. And I wish I had realized it sooner. Like before we had met. Cause then I wouldn't be in any of this mess. I hope you're happy. So if you ever somehow read this, don't you dare try and do anything for me ever again. Because I don't care. And I hate you.

Tony held his breath, his entire body trembling. He tensed, looking over the note again, his eyes flicking to the most hurtful parts. Stop. Stop, Tony. You know him. You know him. His head was pounding, his ears ringing. His hands were shaking but he forced them not to. Tears fought to spill down his cheeks but he didn't allow it.

With effort, he dropped the note and squeezed his eyes shut before he spun with his blaster, facing the door of the room. Someone was here. That note was planted. He knew it. Time didn't change the fact that he knew that kid.

Tony stood there for a second, breathing hard through his nose. He listened, but couldn't hear anything. He prayed he was right as he took a step forward and that's when his blaster went dark. Tony tapped it and then cursed, pulling out the gun he had brought for good measure, laying the blaster to the ground before he gripped the gun with both hands. They knew he was coming.

"FRIDAY?" he whispered harshly, tapping into his coms. "FRIDAY?" Nothing. Tony cursed and pulled out his cell phone but a signal said NO SERVICE. Tony cursed again and slipped it back into his pocket before he looked around, checking Peter's room with his eye on the door. Then he shouldered the wall and peaked into the hallway, gun to his chest.

Tony slowly stepped out, leading with his gun, his eyes flicking across the hallway. Tony heard a sound behind him and he spun towards the end of the empty hallway, narrowing his eyes as he leveled the gun.

Then Tony tensed as the floor creaked and he felt chills down his back. He grit his teeth and tried to spin, finger on the trigger, but it was too late. The gun was knocked from his hand the minute he turned and a fist hit him across the side of the head. Tony slammed into the wall with a groan and hit the ground hard, scrambling to his elbows and crawling back. The person who had hit him storms after him and Tony scrambles to his feet, ducking the next punch. He tackles the attacker around the waist, sending them both tumbling to the ground. Tony slams his elbow across the man's jaw before he feels a hand grasp the back of his shirt and yank him up.

Reeling, Tony attempts to regain his balance, but not before he sees the butt of a gun coming for his head. Pain spiraled from his temple and Tony's legs slipped out from under him. He hit the ground, his head smacking against the floor, and he groaned, his vision tunneling. He couldn't fight it- his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Tony slumps against the ground with a curse on his lips.

YOOOOOOOOOOOOO they're both screwed now :(:(Some of you called it! And I was like YESSSS haha I slipped kidnapped tony in the middle of the tabs so to those that caught that and saw this coming :) yay you

If this was sort of a twist tho? yay you as well XD Sooooo dundundunnnnnnnn some more questions will be answered next chapter....and....we'll get a reunion. Some of you have been asking for iron dad- that's coming don't worry. Just not in the way that you think but it's coming! Tony and Peter are going to be spending a lot of time together in the upcoming chapters. And now that Tony is yeeted out of the equation, Ned's gotta call the Avengers so now they're involved and holy crap this is picking up the pace fast. Before I literally spoil the whole book, I'll go XD

Thank you for reading, pleaseeee let me know what you think! All your comments have made me laugh and smile and are super awesome you guys are great! Until next time....which is ASAP haha

I love you all 3000 <3 <3

We Don't Hug and Make Up

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyyyooooo lovely readers!!!! Thank you so much again for all your support on this story, I am having a blast writing it and am so glad to see you're enjoying it :) it makes my day.

Well I had my coffee and I am actually NOT hyper today?? For once. So! New chapter! I've been pretty good at sticking to the 3 day gaps and chapters will hopefully continue to be around 10k haha

Ew I'm being professional and weird I HOPE EVERYONE IS DOING WELLLLLLL I am great how r u- i already asked that. Anyway this chapter is a YEET we're getting into the good stuff and by good stuff I mean very very bad stuff. This is just a little of what's to come and there's a lotttt of conflicting emotions. Writing this i felt so awkward because they just fight and its like NO so yeah...its a very tense chapter :) I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tony groaned, lifting his head from his chest which felt like it weighed a hundred pounds. He blinked, the white spots that filled his vision scattering as he forced his gaze to sharpen on the man sitting in front of him. Tony flexes his hands and feels them cuffed behind him and he winces, raises his gaze and controlling his breathing after sucking in a breath.

"Back with us, Stark?" the man grins.

"Where's Peter?" Tony croaks.

"How did you know?" the man asks, crossing his arms with a smile as he leans back in his chair. Tony gives him a look of confusion and the man sighs, "The letter. How did you know it was fake?"

Tony blinks and then gives him a smirk. He sighs and shrugs his shoulders, "I know the kid's handwriting."

"Yeah, but we had someone copy his font from his chem notes in his bag. It was nearly indistinguishable," the man said firmly.

"Exactly. Key word *nearly*. You had someone else do it, which means Peter didn't write it. So I could tell. The tilt was off, the stems on his a's are longer and he doesn't ever connect his uppercase P's. Now where is he?" Tony asks again, his eyes flashing. He stretched his other hand in the cuffs, reaching the inside of his sleeve. He slipped out a paper clip and started to bend the metal out of shape in his hands.

"What makes you think he wants anything to do with you?" the man asked, making a face and crossing his legs.

"What makes you think I want anything to do with him except for the fact that I need him to still be breathing because he's a freaking minor?" Tony snarled. The man knew about their fight. This was exactly what Tony wanted to avoid- people using Peter to get to Tony, or vice versa. The longer he

kept up the act that he hated and couldn't care less about him, the safer he was. Fortunately, the man seemed shocked by the sincerity in his voice.

"Wow," the man admits. "I was not expecting this. So, just to be clear, no papa bear instinct kicking in?"

Tony snorted, "You're kidding, right? Look, I just have a problem when a grade A psycho starts stealing innocent kids from their beds. That's why I'm here. That's why I went to his apartment. I kept tabs, because he's frickin sophomore."

The man pointed at him thoughtfully, "You know when Peter told me that you and him had a falling out and kicked each other where it hurts, I'm gonna be honest- I didn't believe him. But turns out he was right. All the stuff he said about you was true, how does that make you feel?" he asked mockingly.

Tony glared at him and then cracked a smile, "My heart is aching and I feel all lost inside."

The man looked at him and let out a laugh as he exclaimed, "What happened to you two?"

"Well, I'd love to sit and chat and maybe break out a Meg Ryan chick flick but it's none of your business what happened between me and the kid. Besides, I've got a meeting in a couple hours so I'd like to wrap this up," Tony snarled, getting the paper clip to the shape he wanted.

The man grinned and straightened in his chair, his eyes widening, "Wow. Forward. I'm afraid you're gonna have to miss that meeting, Stark."

Tony gave him a fake smile, "Well okay then, let's get into the ice breakers. You know my name, but I'm afraid I don't know yours, so if you wouldn't mind filling me in, along with your favorite color, name of your pet, and how old you are, that would be nice," Tony snarled as he shifted in his chair, searching for the key hole in his cuffs. The man laughed and Tony cocked his head, "We can skip the what do you want to be when you grow up because I already know you dreamed of being a sick lunatic."

"My name is Damian. My favorite color is green, I had a cat named Mr. Fluffy when I was a kid, and I'm in my late forties," the man responded without missing a beat. Then he held up his finger, "And actually, no. When I was little, I wanted to be a lawyer. Any more questions?"

"Yeah," Tony hissed, wincing as a tiny scraping noise came from him dragging the metal to find the small hole on the cuffs. Fortunately the man in front of him didn't hear it. Tony pouted his lower lip and asked, "What happened? Harvard kick you out?"

"Very funny, Stark," Damian smiled.

"I thought so too," Tony agreed, finally slipping the paper clip into the hole and holding back a wince as the cuffs bit into his skin as he strained to pick the lock. "What do you want?"

Damian clasped his hands, "If I told you everything I wanted we would be here all night."

"Ok, then. Way to be difficult. Give me a quick summary of why I'm here and why you kidnapped a 16 year old who I had a falling out with a long time ago," Tony snapped.

Damian smirked, "So you hate him, but you're still trying to protect his secret identity? We know Peter is Spiderman."

"And yippee-ki-yay for you, do you want a medal?" Tony asked fiercely, hearing a small click as

the cuffs unlocked. He grasped them with his hands before they could fall off and maintained his composure.

"You know, you are everything I expected and more," the man laughed, pointing at him.

Tony grinned, "Really?"

"Yeah," the man chuckled.

"Yeah?" Tony started to laugh with him before he decided to make his move. Eyes boring into his enemy, he lunged out of the chair gripped the man's collar, yanking him forward and slamming him into the wall. Both chairs toppled and hit the ground behind them. Damian groaned as Tony punched him across the face before kneeing him in the groin. The man doubled over and Tony threw him to the ground in disgust, rage boiling in his veins as he stormed over.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't choke the life out of you right now," Tony swore, pulling him up harshly and pressing his arm against his throat.

"Peter," Damian croaked out with a sick grin, his face turning red as he clawed at Tony's arm that pinned him against the wall. "If you care about the kid, then you'll let me go."

Tony cursed inwardly. If he let him go, he would know he cared. Of course he cared, but if Damian knew that...Peter would be in more danger. If he didn't let him go, maybe he could kill this bastard before he hurt the kid again and get them both out of this mess.

Tony turned toward him, his eyes flashing and he punched Damian hard in the stomach before slamming his forearm harder into his throat. "Okay," Tony snarled.

Suddenly the door slammed open and before Tony could turn, a shot rang out. Holy- well crap. A strip of fire tore into his left shoulder and Tony grit his teeth, his hand clutching the bleeding wound as he stumbled back. It was just a graze, slicing through the meat of his arm, but it was enough for him to falter, which gave the men behind him enough time to tackle him to the ground after Damian pushed him back.

Tony hit the ground hard on his bad shoulder, crying out in pain before two men were on him. Damian wiped his bloody nose, smiling as Tony was wrestled back into the chair, this time his hands tied instead of cuffed. Tony glanced at his shoulder and flexed it with effort, exclaiming, "Wow! You shot me, and we just got to know each other."

"Well, technically I didn't shoot you, he did," Damian smirked, pointing to the man who had pulled the gun.

Blood dripped down his arm and drenched his shirt. Tony mouthed a cuss word at the man and said, "Thanks, bud."

Damian walked over to him and shrugged, "I guess you and Peter are both full of surprises." He shook his head in disbelief, kneeling to scoop up Tony's cuffs that had been picked, admiring the paper clip sticking out of keyhole. "Clever."

"I was always good with my hands," Tony grinned fakely. Damian smiled before he looped the cuffs over his hand and curled his fist, the metal covering his knuckles. He looked at Tony daringly who chuckled, "Oh, you nasty son of a-"

Damian swung, hitting Tony hard across the face with the make shift 'brass knuckles'. Tony held back a cry of pain as he felt his skin split, blood dripping down his cheek. Before he could even

catch his breath he was slugged in the stomach and Tony groaned, feeling a rib crack. He looked up and coughed out, "Nice hit Dames, nice hit." The main straightened at that, giving him a look and Tony grinned weakly, spitting out blood, "What? I nickname everyone, don't feel special."

"You were gonna kill me. Even after I threatened the kid," Damian said slowly. He chuckled in disbelief, "Something is very messed up about the two of you."

"Woah, your last name isn't Holmes, is it?" Tony drawled, hiding his smile of triumph. The more Damian thought they hated each other, the more he would stray for the idea of using them against the other.

"So you don't care about him at all, then?" Damian asked, as if just to make sure.

"What are you, obsessed with us?" Tony spat.

Damian rubbed his chin thoughtfully and then shrugged, "So if I played you a tape of him screaming you wouldn't-"

"You sick bastard," Tony swore on instinct, lunging forward, stopped by the cuffs that were attached to the chair. He tried to play it off and took a deep breath, speaking through gritted teeth, "Look, the kid and I have our problems, but he's still a *kid*."

"Well good, because I don't have a tape," Damian grinned, enjoying Tony's look of fury. "I just wanted to see what you'd say."

Tony shook his head and snorted, "You're one sick little puppy, you know that?"

"Do you want to see him?" Damian asked out of the blue. Tony's gaze snapped up and Damian sauntered forward, crouching in front of Tony and cocking his head with a knowing smile. "That's why you came here, right?"

"Oh, shut up," Tony scoffed. He turned his head to the side, staring at the wall, at least until Damian gripped his chin, forcing it back.

His voice was taunting, "You want to have a nice reunion with your wayward son?" Tony didn't answer. Damian grins and grabs his collar, yanking him out of the chair and dragging him down the hallway. They stop by a door at the end which has a one way mirror on the side and Damian pushes him up against it. Tony doesn't even flinch at the rough movement the minute his eyes fall on Peter. He straightens, his eyes widening, the knot in his stomach tightening.

The kid is cuffed to a chair in the center of the room, bloody and bruised. His face in a mess but he still has that same sarcastic smirk that Tony hasn't seen in three months. He stares at him in disbelief, his shoulders relaxing, his next breath is caught in his throat as he feels tears come to his eyes.

"Not quite the reunion you imaged, huh Stark?" Damian grins, giving him a pat on the shoulder that Tony jerks away from, keeping his eyes on his kid. Peter's shirt is drenched in blood and crusted, like it was covered in water and then air dried too many times. His eyes still spark but the teen is slumped in the chair slightly, hunching over. It's a small detail, that could appear as threatening and hostile, but Tony knows it's quite the contrary. He's nursing hurt ribs. His right leg is shaking just slightly as he taps his leg against the floor, a nervous gesture he picked up from Tony. Tony just stares at him. He never thought he would see the kid again, which ripped him apart inside, but he would take that over seeing Peter this hurt. He looks exhausted-

"Peter hasn't slept in six days," Damian sighs before he coughs, rubbing his mouth to hide a smirk.

"He must be getting a little tired. Seeing you will be a shock though."

Tony glares daggers at the wall so he doesn't turn his head and reveal how furious he actually is. He almost punches the man right then in there but he grits his teeth and raises his chin, curling his fists behind him so hard he draws blood. Damian opens the door and Tony tears his gaze away from Peter with effort as the man enters, keeping the door partly closed to keep Tony out of sight.

Tony cranes his neck to look through the window and he sees Peter ball his fists as he glared at the man inside who was circling him. The teen snickered, "I'm not dead yet buddy, move along," to which Tony almost sobs in relief. It's only been three months, and Tony can even hear the change in his voice. But it's good to hear it again.

"Peter!" Damian grins, announcing his presence and Peter's gaze snaps towards him with a fake smile.

"Hey! Screw you!" Peter calls energetically and Tony cracks a proud smirk at his sarcasm. "Don't be happy to see me, it makes me uncomfortable," Peter adds while scrunching up his nose and Tony can't help it, he lets out a small and quiet laugh filled with pure joy.

Damian winks, "I've got a surprise for you, kid."

"And don't call me kid, either- man, you are messing up all over the place," Peter shakes his head with a slight laugh. "Although I'm always a fan of surprises. I do hope it's a pony. I was never allowed to have one in...my...apartment..."

Peter trails off, his face instantly slackening, because Damian reached through the door and grabbed Tony's shirt, hauling him into view. Then he smiles, giving him a harsh shove forward. Tony regains his footing before he can fall and weakly raises his head to meet the kid's gaze. Peter's jaw clenches, and it almost looks like a flutter of hope ripples through his body before it's instantly extinguished. Peter just stares. He swallows harshly like his throat just closed up and the kid's lips part just slightly as his eyes widen, looking at him in disbelief. A wave of emotion washes over his expression- anger, happiness, downright *fury*, confusion, disbelief, relief, sadness, terror, pain, fear, guilt...there's a hundred more and Tony sees every single one.

He returns the look but that's pretty much all he does. He doesn't know what else to do. What to say. What to think. But he's not gonna let Damian ruin this. He's not gonna let this kid down again. Not again. Tony's voice cracks as he attempts to fit everything he wants to say, every emotion he wants to express, into two words.

"Hey, Pete."

Dead silence. And it speaks much, *much* louder than words for the two damaged people who have their gazes locked from either side of the room. Another second goes by, Tony and Peter still haven't blinked.

"Well this is all very touching," Damian grins, clapping Tony on his bad shoulder, making him wince. He shakes his head, biting his lip, "The tension in this room is just-"

"You're really enjoying this, aren't you?" Tony demands, spinning around in fury. "You think this is some reality TV show or a fun story you get to manipulate?"

Damian winces, "You're getting defensive. Should I...leave you two alone?" Tony gives him a glare that literally makes him stumble. The man grins, pointing to the door, "I'm gonna- enjoy each other's company. I'll be back soon," He and the man in the corner leave the room and the door

shuts.

Tony turns back around but he doesn't make eye contact with the kid. His heart is pounding and he can't focus. He knew that Peter was in cuffs, so he thinks maybe he can find something that could pick the lock...even if it only gave the teen a second of freedom before the men came back in. He walks slowly over to the table which has a bunch of sharp looking tools on it, all clean, thank God. It meant they weren't used. He would die before those things were covered with Peter's blood.

"What are you doing?" Peter snaps from behind him and Tony flinches. Those were his first words to him and they meant so much more than Peter knew.

"Going on a treasure hunt," Tony responds, taking the bite out of his retort to soften it. "I'm trying to find something to pick your cuffs, Einstein."

"You can't pick the lock. They're titanium and they run electrically," Peter drawls.

Tony sighs, "Well it doesn't hurt to try-"

"I have been trying. For the six days actually. Trust me. Oh wait, you probably don't anymore," Peter snarls. Tony winces with his back turned, lowering his head in defeat. Now he had nothing to occupy himself with, so he had to face him.

"What happened to your shoulder?" Peter asks, his voice strictly monotone. There wasn't much care in his voice, more a desperate need to fill the silence.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Tony growled back.

"No, I really wouldn't, actually," Peter sniffed. "I'm just trying to make polite conversation."

Tony sighed, "I got shot."

"You probably deserved it," Peter commented.

Tony grit his teeth, hard, and made a face, "I did try and kill him."

"Sounds like you, always making irrational decisions without thinking of the consequences?" Peter says angrily.

Tony turns around and their furious gazes clash, giving him flashbacks to their earlier fights. The first and last time they thought they would stare at each other in hate. "Is there something you want to say, kid?"

"There's a lot I want to say," Peter swore with a fake laugh, his expression immediately morphing into one of fury and pain.

"Yeah, I bet. You always did run your mouth," Tony drawls back, turning to face the other wall again and see what he had to work with to get them both out of this mess. Being angry with his back turned was so much easier. Tony hated looking at the kid with a cold expression, but it made it easier when Peter was already doing it. Not willing to turn around just yet, Tony looks at the table before he makes a face and slams his hip into it. It flips instantly with a loud bang, the contents scattering across the ground with a clatter. Tony nods in satisfaction, giving a slight grin.

He misses Peter's identical smile, but he does hear a snort behind him, "You're like one of those cats who knocks stuff over for fun."

Tony turns around and looks at Peter who loses the cocky, sarcasm facade immediately. His gaze crumples with hurt and Peter desperately tries to build it back up before he can notice, but it's too late. Tony's voice comes out low and shaky, "You ok, kid?"

"Yeah, just peachy," Peter gives him a fake smile through a split lip and bloody nose. His bangs are covering his black eye. Peter avoids his gaze as much as possible and jerks his head forward in question, "How did they get you?"

"I was at *your* apartment," Tony glares without meaning to, feeling a bit of the old anger churn in his stomach.

Peter nods firmly, obviously feeling it too, "Oh, so it was my fault."

"I didn't say that," Tony snaps.

"Look, we're fighting again," Peter laughs without humor, shaking his head in disbelief. Tony opens his mouth to speak before he decides against it. Then Peter croaks, "Hey Pete? Three months and that's what you say?"

"I'm not a poet," Tony says.

"Oh I know you're not," Peter exclaims with a snort. "Good rescue, too. I just wanted to give you props for that. I guess I'm not the only dead weight, huh?"

Tony flinches and he raises his glare at the insult. Before he can help it, he mutters, "Screw you."

Peter doesn't miss a beat. "Right back at you," he sneers. "How were your three months, Tony? Mine were freeing," he spits. "Life changing, even."

"Good for you," Tony hisses. "No, I'm serious. Good for you Pete, I'm so glad."

"You should be!" Peter yelled, his gaze dark.

"I am!" Tony shouted back.

"God, I was doing fine before you walked in," Peter cursed, shaking his head.

Tony laughed without humor and waved his tied hands, "Oh, yeah, I'll be out of your hair then."

"Please," Peter insisted. "Move cells or something."

"What, are you tired of me already?" Tony hissed, taking a step forward.

"Yeah, three minutes was too much," Peter swore back.

Tony looked around the room incredulously, "And where do you want me to go?"

"Hell, preferably," Peter admitted. "But since that's obviously not an option, just out of this room."

Tony swore, shaking his head and nodding at him, his voice raising again, "Real mature, Pete."

"You're one to talk," Peter shouted back.

The door opened and Damian slipped in, whistling, "You both have got some *issues*! Look, I know I said I would leave you alone for a bit, but I just couldn't help myself. I mean, wow. Can't you both just hug and make up?"

"Shut up!" Both Tony and Peter swore at him, exchanging dirty looks afterward. They were on opposite sides of the room, avoiding eye contact and Damian pulled up a chair to sit in the middle.

"So...therapy session?" Damian suggested, rubbing his hands.

"Piss off," Peter muttered, shaking his head. He had beaten Tony by one second.

"No, I'm serious, you both vent, we'll work through this together. I'm a great listener," he promised.

Peter smiled fakely, "You know what? That sounds great!" he smiled. "I think I have a 3rd grade diary we can read through too."

Damian took the hint and put up his hands in surrender. "Touchy," he grinned, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Yeah, that's what your wife said," Tony snapped from the other side of the room with a pointed look. He couldn't let Peter take all the blows when it came down to payback time for sarcastic comments thrown.

Damian froze and looked between the two of them with wide eyes. Then he laughed and pointed at Peter, "I see where you get it from now!"

"Excuse me?" Peter snapped.

Damian grinned, pushing his hands on his knees to stand up before he sauntered forward, pointing at Peter. "Your witt? Your sarcasm? That humor you use when you're backed so tight into a corner you're scratching at the walls?" he asked. He spun and pointed to Tony, "It's all him. I didn't see it before, but I can't believe I missed it."

Tony straightened and immediately avoided Peter's gaze. The kid shifted his weight in the chair before he smiled fakely, muttering, "You can shut up now, thanks."

Damian eyed the two of them and then looked back at the door, motioning to some people who apparently had been waiting. Damian went towards Peter and one of the men that came in went for Tony. Damian curled his hand around Peter's collar and yanked him up without a thought, pulling him to the center of the room. Tony was shoved forward as well until they were face to face. He and Peter exchanged glances and set their jaws.

"God, it's like looking at two of you," Damian muttered from in between them, pressing his hands to his temples before he reached without warning and grabbed Peter's chin. He didn't miss how Tony flinched and tensed in his captor's grasp, his eyes flashing. He turned Peter's head towards Tony and asked mockingly in a quiet voice, "Does this bother you?"

Yes it did bother him. Very much so. He wanted to yell at the bastard to get his hands off his kid and kill him if he ever touched him again. Tony's gaze flicked to Peter and he steeled his look, sneering at Damian, "Shove off."

Damian locked eyes with him and pushed Peter's chin away before he spun, slamming his elbow across Tony's face. Holy crap- he wasn't expecting that. Tony fell with a groan, landing on his side and blinking, reeling from the hit. The man who had been holding him in place hadn't helped with the fall; he let him go the minute he was punched. Damian walked forward and Tony swore as he was yanked to his feet, about to struggle until something sharp pricked his throat. Tony froze, snarling, well aware of the knife being held to his neck. Both Tony and Damian saw Peter's chest rise and fall slightly faster, tensing in place. No one was holding the kid, but he didn't surge

forward.

Damian twirled the knife expertly between his fingers, Tony's eyes following it before he landed to rest against his cheek. Peter's nostrils flared and he set his shoulders back, taking a deep breath as he stood mere feet away.

"You seriously gonna Princess Bride me, man?" Tony grumbled, his tied hands curling behind his back.

"Tony, when will you learn to keep your freaking mouth shut?" Peter snapped, surprising him. Then he looked at Damian and hissed, "I know what you're doing."

"Oh really?" Damian asked innocently. He lightly dragged the knife down Tony's cheek, nicking his lip before stopping at his chin. With his eyes fully on the teenager in front of him he made a small cut on Tony's jaw, earning a sharp exhale, but that wasn't the prize reaction.

"Stop it," Peter seethed in anger.

Damian smiled and stepped away in fake surrender, hitting Tony in the back of the head with the butt of the knife. Peter winced every so slightly, and Damian saw it. Tony squeezed his eyes shut and bit back a curse as he dropped to his knees, ducking his head and muttering, "Son of a--"

Peter did not rush to Tony's side. He stayed where he was, his gaze fierce and hateful and Damian nodded, slipping the knife back into his strap on his leg. Then he shrugged. "Diagnosis? You're telling the truth, Peter," he said. "But not the whole truth."

"Care to enlighten me?" Peter snapped in anger, his nostrils flaring.

"You and Tony," Damian pointed between the two of them. "You both need to work things out, that's not a doubt. Something happened," he bit his lip with a wide eyed expression that reeked of someone who was witnessing an event they didn't want to be apart of. Then he made a face, "If I didn't know better, I'd say you broke each other."

Both Tony and Peter gulped and looked away just slightly, and it didn't go unnoticed. Damian narrows his eyes and he slowly grins, "But a few pieces remain intact. Including that undeniable, unhealthy, and blatantly obvious touching relationship I was right to put my faith in."

"You're bluffing, again," Peter sneered, shaking his head. "You're just trying to spook me. It's not gonna work. You gain nothing from this--"

"You would give your life for Tony in an instant, Peter," Damian snapped, his eyes gleaming like he had just pushed the red button on a bomb.

If he had, Peter defused it just as quickly and confidently. "No."

Damian's smile faltered, meanwhile Tony's heart shattered. He looked up at the kid who showed no signs that he was lying. Damian looked to Tony who looked more defeated then he was and he laughed nervously, "You mind restating that--"

"I said no," Peter said, taking a step towards Damian. "A while I ago, I would have said yes. I- I almost have actually," Peter trailed off and he looked at his feet. When he glanced back up his gaze was stronger than ever and he shrugged, "But times have changed. Now I wouldn't. You want to hook me up to a lie detector?"

Shocked, Damian put out his hands, looking around the room at the imaginary audience, "Did you

hear that folks? Let's see what Tony has to say about that. Do tell, Stark."

He looked at Tony who was on his knees, staring in utter disbelief, trying to convince himself that maybe Peter had said it to stop him from getting hurt. He knew he would have been forced to deliver that blow if rolls were reversed. Something was cracking inside of him, something he thought had been shattered long ago, but he guessed wasn't. It was still here and now it was finally breaking.

He had never wanted Peter to die for him, or even get hurt because of him. So why did this hurt? This was the one thing he had always wanted Peter to say...not knowing it would be this painful.

Tony tried to breathe, he forced himself to, and he blinked. The world spiraled back to him and he found himself saying, "I don't blame him." His voice was quiet and defeated- so much smaller than he had thought it would be. But somehow he managed a weak smile and met Peter's eyes with a small shake of his head as he repeated it in a whisper, "I don't blame you, Pete."

Damian straightened at that, his eyes widening, and he turned to Peter as if waiting for something...but nothing came after that. Realization hit, and Damian lowered his head with a grin. Then he brought his hands together. One slow clap turned into two, which turned into three, and both Tony and Peter dared exchange looks as the lunatic started applauding next to them.

Damian shook his head, pointing at Peter, "You almost got me, Peter. You really had me, for a good while, I swear. I almost bought it! I almost bought the act."

"What's he talking about?" Tony growled, trying to stagger to his feet with effort, wounded from the past minute.

"I don't know," Peter responded in genuine confusion, his gaze strictly on Damian who pointed at him.

"You told me there was only one person in the world who can call you *Pete*, huh? Make that two. And I bet you have the same feelings about Tony here, as you did about your own Daddy Parker," he snarled. Peter's gaze fell for only a second, but Tony saw it, and Damian must have seen it because he stuck his finger into Peter's chest and gave him a twisted smile, "You're not fooling me, Peter. I see right through you, and now that I know what hurts you, you can do us all a favor and drop the act, okay?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Peter swore furiously, his eyes flashing. It was convincing, but Tony saw through it, and Damian did too.

Damian smiled and glanced around like there were more than six people in the room, "It's good. It's good. It's actually really good-" He closed the space in seconds, before Tony could even put up hands to protect himself. The punch was nasty, right across the eyebrow and Tony went straight to the floor. Damian raised his fist again but then a yell pierced the room.

"STOP!" Peter demanded, snarling. "You have a bad habit of just punching people." He raises his chin as Damian stands and stares him down. "Ever invest in a bag?" Peter sniffs.

Damian smiled, straightening his jacket, "You can mask," he waved his hand between Tony and Peter, *"this* with as much humor as you want. But you're just proving my point, kiddo."

"Don't call him that," Tony spat, blood sprinkling the stone as he got to his feet.

"Shut up, Tony," Peter hissed almost automatically, not tearing his hateful gaze away from Damian.

The man smirked, clasping his hands, "You two figure out whatever it is you guys have going on here, and I'll be back later, okay? For real this time. It's getting late. No sleeping for you though. Tony, I think you need a chair-" Damian looked around.

"I'm good, thanks," Tony grinned. Damian smiled and a minute later Tony was forced into a chair facing Peter, his wrists tied to back. "The left one's a little loose," Tony made a face, "do you think you could-" Damian took a cheap shot to his jaw and tightened the ropes and Tony winced, shaking his head to clear the dizziness. "Yeah, yeah, that's better."

"You've got to have broken knuckles by now. Don't you get tired?" Peter snaps.

"No, Peter, I don't," Damian smiles. "But you are. Six days of no sleep, and now we're going on seven? Good luck, champ."

"Screw you," Peter muttered, shifting his position in the chair.

Damian raised his eyebrows, "You guys should be thanking me. It's like a nice therapy session for the two of you. God knows you need it."

Tony spits out blood and drawls over his shoulder, "Oh yeah, give us a pen and I'll use it to write a thank you card before I stab it in your-"

"Woah, Tony, no need to get graphic," Damian put up his hands in defense.

"And when you get back we're gonna collect little flowers for you as a sign of gratitude," Peter continued, smiling fakely at the man who was backing towards the door.

"Do you prefer dandelions or tulips?" Tony shouted as Damian laughed in amusement and slipped through. He and Peter flinched as the door shut, leaving them alone.

Ned paced. He looked at his phone which sitting silently on the desk, not lighting up or buzzing. Tony was supposed to call him. He was supposed to call him. It was late. He hadn't called him. His legs were jumping as he sat nervously on his bed.

Ned swore louder after another minute of waiting and finally made a noise of impatience and stood, hitting his head on the top bunk. He rubbed his hair with a wince and ran over to his phone, scrolling through the contacts. His thumb hovered over the one that Tony had attached when they had last talked, before he pushed down on it.

"This can't be happening. This is crazy. This is so crazy." He squeezed his eyes shut and put the phone to his ear, hearing it ring. It clicked and someone picked up.

"Hello?"

Ned pressed a hand to his forehead, "Hi. Steve Rogers. This is Ned. Peter's friend. Tony told me to call you. Something really really bad happened because Tony told me to call you if he didn't contact me, and well...he didn't contact me and I think it's been long enough so you have to listen to me right now- it's very important."

Steve snapped his fingers and the rest of the Avengers who were playing darts quieted their chatter. He winced, putting a hand to his ear, "Slow down, kid, what?"

"My name is Ned Leeds. I'm a friend of Peter Parker's. He got kidnapped by someone, I don't know who and I told Tony about it and he went to go check it out but I haven't heard from him-"

"Ok, ok, hey. Guys," Steve waved his hand urgently, getting everyone's attention. "Lab, now. Talk to me, Ned."

"Peter didn't show up for his chem quiz, which is weird because he always does. He took one when he had a 104 fever. He also just broke his phone, which I don't think was an accident. So after six days I called Tony because I had his number from a thing last year and I knew he and Peter and...you guys too actually- anyway you all had a falling out but Tony said I was right to call-"

"What's going on?" Nat demanded as she caught up to him.

"I don't know," Steve said as he raced down the hallway, trying to keep track of the kid's rambling. "Have any of you talked to Tony lately?"

"No, I thought he went out," Rhodey said. "I saw him this morning but that was it."

Steve muttered a curse. No one said language, not with the expression currently on his face. He turned into the lab and rushed down the steps, looking around and putting the phone on speaker. The team gathered around, shifting their weight nervously and Steve said, "Ok. Okay, I'm in the lab and I've got the team here, now tell me what happened."

"I called Tony and he and I found out that someone had hacked Peter's email. They have eyes on May- at least we're assuming they do. She's on an overseas trip and they're sending emails to her like they're Peter to make sure she doesn't get suspicious. I sent an email to Peter too and whoever wrote be back was not him."

"So some people have Peter?" Clint demanded, his eyes wide.

"They have for a week," Ned said miserably.

Steve could hear the guilt in his voice and he cut in, "Ned, listen to me. This was not your fault, okay? You couldn't have known. Whoever has Peter knows what they're doing-"

"Peter and Tony."

The entire team blanched. Wanda whispered, "They got the kid and Stark?"

"Fill us in Ned, come on," Steve said urgently, his knuckles white as he gripped the chair.

"Tony told me to stay put. He said to send another email saying I got my phone taken and that I hoped he felt better and- and that I would see him at school. He said he was going to go to Peter's apartment and check things out and he gave me your number and Rhodes' number to call if I didn't hear back from him. Well he went...and I haven't heard back from him."

Curses rang out from the ground and Steve pressed a hand to the table, "Okay, okay, Ned, you did your job, okay? You might have just saved your friend and Tony Stark's life. Do you know anything about who took them?"

"No, but FRIDAY has an IP address and the tracking tech. The problem is they're hopping satellites so she can't get a lock."

Steve looked around, "FRIDAY, show me what you've got. Someone track Tony's phone."

Nat was already on a computer and she shook her head, "Dead."

"Nothing sir. I was waiting for the call. Tony brought a blaster with him, but I was completely locked out of all access to that block. Traffic cams, his suit, security cameras on stores? They all were jammed by an outside source that's been erased. I've been analyzing the footage I can from the perimeter but it's massive, Steve. He could be anywhere."

"So either they are still inside the circle of the cameras they blew, or their truck or whatever is on one of the cameras that they didn't fry. They've got to be somewhere," Bruce said, biting the edge of his glasses.

"It's hours of footage from millions of cameras but yes, they are somewhere on some footage."

"What about Peter? He was taken too, when there were no jammed cameras," Bucky suggests.

"Yes, but we don't know when. We have a week time frame, which would mean the amount of footage I would have to go through is about the same as I have now."

"Also...you guys know he's Spiderman...right?" Ned asked slowly.

Sam sighed, "Yes, Ned. We know the kid's Spiderman."

"Good, I didn't want to totally bust him. But he could have been on a patrol that night and he goes pretty far out. So...yeah, searching for Tony would probably be easier since we know he wasn't halfway across New York."

Rhodey cursed, "So that means they probably know the kid's Spiderman too...that's never good."

"Yeah, what's worse is him and Tony in a room together," Steve grumbled, checking his watch. "Tony's only been gone a few hours. I want this strictly confidential. No one outside this room knows."

"What about May?" Bruce asked. "She's overseas. She still thinks Peter's home. Should we tell her?"

Steve cursed. Nat was the one who shook her head. "No. That will just put her in more danger."

Wanda backed towards the door, "I'll get her travel information and have an undercover team placed on her." Nat nodded and Wanda left.

"I'm gonna reach out to my contacts, see if they have any info," Nat said firmly, her fists curled, her gaze cold. "If someone kidnapped Tony Stark, they've got to be a big enough bastard to brag about it."

"I'm gonna go check out the apartment," Steve said, running a hand through his hair. "See if there's anything I missed. "Rhodes, you wanna back me up?"

"Yeah," Rhodey said immediately, walking to his side as they started heading for the door.

"Viz, I need you to cancel any trip or conference we have for the next month," Steve said. "Then start helping FRIDAY comb through data. Whenever anyone is done with a job, come right back here to watch some videos. Look for a van, truck, or a car with more than four passengers in it. Tinted windows is a good guess. The faster we zero in on who took him the faster we can track them."

Steve started for the steps before he turned, "And I need two people to start looking at abandoned buildings and underground structures. See who owns them and if they have a clean record."

Sam and Bucky looked at each other and nodded, "On it." They passed Steve and Rhodey and left the lab, the door swinging shut behind them.

"I'm trying to see when the last point of intercept was on Tony's phone. If it was moving, we may be able to see at least what direction they was going before the bastards snapped his sim card," Clint said, his eyes glued to the screen.

"*What can I do?*" Ned asked.

Steve picked up the phone as everyone split off to get to work. "Kid, you've done a lot. Tony probably told you to call us and then stay the hell out of this did he not?"

"*Yeah,*" Ned grumbled. "*But-*"

"Well I'm gonna tell you to do that too," Steve said firmly. "We'll find them." He hung up the phone and followed Rhodes out the door, grabbing his shield and clicking it in place on his shoulder.

Peter was fuming. Tony was here.

Tony. Was. Here.

A mix of emotions had been crashing around in Peter's head like tidal waves ever since the man who he never thought he would see again was roughly pushed forward into this room. The building pressure was enough to give him a headache, his heart pounding so hard his chest stung whenever he sucked in a breath. The amount of terror he felt when he first saw Tony made his world turn upside down, and the amount of anger that washed over him *almost* snapped him out of it.

Words from the voicemail echoed through his head, but the guilt stricken look of relief that Peter locked eyes with seemed out of place for someone who would send a message like that. For a second he considered that the voicemail was a fake, but then he realized Tony was never intending for him to hear it. Conflicted, confused, and broken, Peter just stared.

He was wishing he could go punch, hug and then *punch* the man that made hesitant eye contact with him. Now they were both screwed, and Peter was even more angry. Angry that Damian was getting under his skin, angry that Tony was here, angry for no reason about everything. But he also had every reason. Peter's head was spinning.

Early on, a couple days after he broke contact with Tony, he had wished that somehow they would be forced in the same room again, could talk it out, and get back to normal. That was all he had wanted. And now that is exactly what he had gotten and they had immediately resorted to fighting, not showing any care for each other. Peter didn't know what to think, especially when Damian came in trying to exploit something that Peter didn't even think was still there.

As Damian picked their relationship apart, Peter felt vulnerable and exposed. He wanted to tell Tony that he couldn't care less about him, to get back at him for everything, especially because Tony obviously thought nothing of him. But he couldn't. Even when Peter lied to Damian and said he wouldn't die for him, when he mouthed off with sarcastic comments and held back flinches and protective glares each time Tony got punched...it wasn't enough. He still broke. He couldn't stop the wince as Damian kept his eyes on Peter and cut Tony's skin with the knife, just to get a

reaction.

Peter hated himself for it. He wanted to scream at the man, convince him that he hated him, but deep down...Peter couldn't. What he hated was that in even thinking about that, it went against everything that made him...him. Protecting Tony was part of him, like a characteristic that defined his entire life. It was his life. Their relationship had been a key part of him, his personality, his confidence, his sense of humor...

Peter tried to even form the words that would hurt Tony as much as he had been hurt, and somehow spit them out with venom, but it went against his moral fibers. Three months ago, Peter thought everything had shattered, and that nearly brought him to his knees. But the true pain came from Damian playing off the few pieces that Peter hadn't known remained intact. He had no idea what to do, how to get out of this, or what to even begin to say to the man in front of him.

Right now he avoided Tony's gaze, despite them being practically face to face mere feet away. He also stubbornly kept the annoyed and bored expression on his face; he didn't want the man in front of him to know how much he was hurting. Deep down he knew Tony could see through it, so he just prayed the man didn't look. Who was to say he even knew Peter as well as he used to.

Peter slowly raised his gaze and saw Tony's head slumped to his chest, his face cut up and bruised, the fabric at his shoulder soaked with blood. Peter realized that Tony had taken all the hits in the past couple minutes. Peter hadn't taken one. He glanced over Tony's cuts and wondered if...if maybe he had taken them *for* Peter? He soon decided against it. Tony had still sent that voicemail, he reminded himself. He doesn't care about you. Just thinking that brought him back to the face Tony made when he was pushed roughly in the back. He had stumbled, and then looked up, locking gazes with Peter. The relief in his eyes was blatant, and the love and guilt in his voice as he whispered harshly laid out what he wanted to say plain as day. Peter had pressed him on his choice of words, but he couldn't have pictured anything else more telling.

Tony was the one to break the silence, snapping Peter out of his thoughts. His voice was rough but hinted a sliver of compassion, "What did they do to you, kid?"

Peter forcefully turned his gaze to him and sneered, "Why do you care?" Then, at Tony's wince, he softened his tone and sighed, "Nothing too bad. Couple beatings. Wounded pride. Cold shower." Their gazes met and he gave a small shrug. "They're not very creative."

"I'm sorry I didn't find you sooner," Tony said quietly. "I mean that. I know we- we have our issues..." he trailed off before he sat straighter, flinching from his ribs probably- Peter knew the second he saw him that Tony was nursing a broken one. Both of them over analyzed that cut off sentence differently in the second that followed.

Peter looked up and swallowed painfully. Then he smirked and purposely left the snark out of his next words, "Well like I said before, nice rescue."

"Thanks," Tony scoffed with a small smile. "I try." Another painfully awkward minute goes by and then Tony says, "You want to play 20 questions?"

"What, so we get to know each other again?" Peter snaps without thinking, and he curls his hands behind him in a furious attempt to calm himself. "Has three months been that long for you?"

"I forgot how you liked to turn everything into an argument," Tony sighs, shaking his head.

Because if I don't, then I'll be truthful, Peter thinks. Instead he says weakly, "Well, that's what we're best at anyway."

Tony laughs, but it's deprived of humor. He narrows his eyes at Peter and makes a face, sucking in a breath, "Wow. Good to know."

Peter's gaze flicks to Tony's shoulder as he flexs it with a wince, blood soaking his shirt. Peter hides his concern with a grumble, "You're not gonna bleed out on me, are ya?"

"Well you said you wanted me gone so if I do, you might get your wish. Congratulations," Tony winked sarcastically. Suddenly some of the lights go out, leaving them in the dim room. Peter has been through this before.

Tony looks around nervously and Peter sighs, "Relax. They just shut off some of the lights to save power for the night. It will be back up in a few hours."

"So what, we're just supposed to sit here?" Tony demanded.

Peter sighed, "I don't like it any more than you do."

Tony shoots him a look, and that's when Peter notices how bloodshot his eyes are. He hadn't seen it before, but he sees it now. His eyes are red and there are dark circles under them. He looks awful. Maybe it's the lighting but Peter has a feeling that he hasn't been sleeping either. Besides, when Peter had first gotten here, they had pumped him full of sedatives- he figured they did the same to Tony. Adrenaline kept him awake, but that was wearing down now, letting the drugs take effect. The dimming lights must not have helped either. Five minutes later, after a period of complete silence, Peter's gaze snaps to Tony as his head dips to his chest.

"They shot you up, Tony," Peter sighs, unable to hold back his demand of rest any longer. "Just go to s-"

"Shut up, kid," Tony slurs, desperately trying to stay awake. His chin is drifting to his chest and Peter keeps his mouth shut in hopes that he does sleep because God knows he needs it. Sure enough, a couple minutes later, Tony's eyes close and Peter sighs, shifting in his spot and flexing his wrists in the cuffs.

He shakes his head and mutters a curse, before he looks around and starts twisting his hands in his cuffs like he had done for the past six nights. The metal bit into his skin and Peter was grateful for the pain; it kept him awake. His blinking soon became heavier and his breathing got slower. Peter's eyelids drooped and he forced his head up once, his ears already ringing because he knew what was coming. He grit his teeth, nearly whimpering with exhaustion, pressing his lips together hard. Don't-

Peter's eyes closed, and before his chin could even hit his chest a massive ring blasted through the speakers. Peter cried out, snapping awake and jerking in the chair. He slammed his ear against his shoulder, squeezing his eyes shut, his limbs going rigid. Sobs built in his throat as it got louder, his ears popping, pressure building in his head. Peter cried out for a second time, gasping for breath and gulping down nausea as he thrashed in his cuffs.

"Peter! Hey! You idiot, you're gonna hurt yourself, stop!" Tony yelled, yanking on his ropes furiously. "What the hell is going on?"

The noise faded and Peter went limp in his seat, flexing his jaw and taking shuddery breaths as he opened his eyes. White spots scattered from his vision and he sat up, rubbing his ear against his shoulder.

"Kid! Hey! Peter!" Tony yelled with wide eyes. "Want to tell me what the hell that was?" he

demanded fiercely.

Peter looked up weakly, his voice shaking. "It's a high pitch frequency only I can hear I guess. If I fall asleep, they blast it and- and- that's why I can't-" Peter licks his lips. "I can't-"

"These bastards won't let you sleep?" Tony swore, finishing his sentence.

"No," Peter whispered, scrunching up his nose and swallowing a sob. Tears bit at his eyes as he tried to control the ringing in his ears. The pressure was subsiding in his head, but at a slow rate. "Just- just stop. Sorry." He squeezes his eyes shut again, shaking his head to clear the dizziness before taking a deep breath and shifting in his seat.

"You don't need to apologize, kid- KID. HE'S SIXTEEN!" Tony yelled to no one in particular before returning his gaze back on Peter. "So tell me about your three months." Peter shot him a look and Tony sighed, "Look, you're not gonna be able to sleep. I won't be able to either. You need to stay awake and frankly, so do I. So unless you want to take turns telling bedtime stories, I suggest you tell me about your three months."

Peter hesitated, keeping the flare in his gaze when he raised it. "Just so we're clear-"

"You hate me, I hate you, we're one happy family. Get on with it," Tony said firmly, avoiding eye contact.

"You just quoted Barney," Peter piped up.

Tony shot him a look, "I loosely quoted it- and are kidding me? Are you kidding me right now?" he swore. "Do you want to talk or not, because look, as much as we hate this," he snarled, "we're stuck here. I'm trying to make the most of this because I don't want Damian to laugh in my face or have something to hold over me. If we don't talk, we're screwed, so I suggest you take the invitation."

Peter took the invitation, and just started talking. A minute later however, it had escalated to yelling.

"You're unbelievable, you know that?" Tony hissed. "Are you incapable of having a conversation?"

"Well in case you forgot what you asked, you asked how my three months were, and that's sort of a sore subject," Peter shot back with a sarcastic drawl. "And excuse me for not wanting to have the one person who I wished I would never see again show up and want to discuss the last couple months of my life!"

Tony blinked, masking pain and snarled, "You never wanted to see me again?"

"No," Peter swore firmly. The reasons were different than what were probably running through Tony's head but in that second Peter didn't care.

"Well then maybe you shouldn't have gotten yourself kidnapped," Tony shook his head and looked away.

Peter looked at him incredulously, "Oh yeah! WUPS, my bad!"

"This is your bad," Tony snapped.

"Right, because everything is my fault," Peter scoffed, his voice raising, "Like the fight was my fault. Like getting stabbed was my fault-"

"Did I say that?" Tony yelled. Peter glared and Tony shook his head, "No, I'm serious, Peter! When we first had our fight, did I say that? The entire reason all this happened was because it wasn't your fault. Just because you are so eager to throw yourself under the bus, doesn't mean I put you there in the first place. You twist my words, all the time."

"Or maybe I just voice what you really want to say," Peter said brokenly. The voicemail echoed in his head and tears came to his eyes. "You were the one who walked out, not me!" he whispered harshly, before he screamed. "You turned around and walked out *on me*, Tony! The door closed and you were the one who shut it, you son of a-"

"You didn't exactly stop me!" Tony yelled back in fury. "And then again, later? Guess who came back to fix things? But you wanted no part of that!"

"Can you blame me?" Peter screamed. His throat was raw, his vision was turning red and Peter's voice cracked from all this shouting.

"You obviously do!" Tony shot back. "This fight goes both ways Peter, so until you admit that it wasn't just me who screwed up, we're not getting anywhere. But wait, you're too stubborn. So you know what? I'm done. I've tried to fight for this, but you've got to actually want to and I see you don't give a crap about me. So I'm signing off," Tony snarled.

Peter stayed quiet, his heart pounding, and he clenched his jaw. His stomach dropped as the knot took over, twisting tighter and tighter, choking out the life that he had been clinging to. Tears stung at his eyes and he avoided Tony's gaze but the man spoke again and Peter winced, not wanting to hurt anymore.

"I knew we were done the minute I got you in the ambulance and we drove to the compound."

Peter froze. He waited for the pain of that sentence but it never came. The reason was not what he was expecting. That sentence wasn't true. He had never been in an ambulance- Tony had carried him. Peter had felt his arm slip under his legs and felt his head bump against his chest. Tony had instructed him on where to put his hands to stop the bleeding, Peter knew that. It was Tony's voice that kept him awake, small but firm encouragements and pleas that had kept him fighting, pulling him from out of the pain he was drowning in. He remembered his sore head that rested against Tony's armored chest, and strong arms that encircled him and made him feel safe. He looked up in confusion and nearly jumped in surprise; Tony was staring at him pointedly, urging, begging.

"You heard me," Tony said simply. There was an angered tone in his voice, but it was firm and telling. His eyes told a different story.

Peter looked at him in shock, confusion, and utter disbelief. Tony had been lying. How long, Peter didn't know, but he was definitely lying. Maybe the entirety of the conversation. You heard me...Tony had said it for a reason, just like he had started the fight for a reason. It was such a Tony thing to do, but now Peter was starting to understand. Make Damian think they hated each other, and then they couldn't be used as a weakness.

Peter nodded slowly, and then licked his lips, swallowing painfully. He stuttered, "I- I hear you."

"Good."

For the first time in three months, their gazes did not display a single bit of hate for a simple second before they both looked away.

Chapter End Notes

YEET so there's a lot to unpack. Damian is a jerkkk i already hate him and I'm sure you do too and Tony and Peter are just....those boys are gonna be the death of me. But at least now the avengers are trying to find them! See! I'm nice to my characters- that's a lie I'm totally not. I have so much planned that's gonna rip my heart out but it's fine, that's what yall are here for. Didn't say I didn't warn you :)

ANYWAYYYY Let me know what you thought in the comments!! I love hearing from you guys and I really appreciate the support, you guys are the best! I'm hyped for whats to come you should SEE my notes they are literally so hectic and crazy lol so stay tuned! New chapter out in 3 days hopefully haha and I will see you then!
I love you 3000 <3 <3

Don't Worry, I Can Take A Hit...

Chapter Notes

Heyyyy lovely readers <3 I'm so sorry this is a little late, life took over :(

Once again, I am just absolutely FLOORED by the response to this story I love all of you and you guys are the best!!! The comments made my day and I appreciate all the support!!!!

Onto this chapter which gets a little intense and also has some catch up on how Avengers are doinnnnnn

Peter and Tony are still....being Peter and Tony. They're idiots and I love them XD

Anyway I hope you all are staying sane, I haven't had coffee yet so I should probably go get some because I am literally falling asleep lollllll I feel like I've said that before but at this point, it's summer, i need a vacation, and breakfast and I got into a fight and are not talking XD. Except for bagels- those are good. Before I go listing any more good foods, I'm gonna let you read on <3

Enjoy the chapter!!! Again, sorry it was late you have no idea how much I wanted to post it earlier haha :((((

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They had stayed awake the entire night. Peter insisted Tony sleep but each time, he refused. If Peter was forced to stay awake, then so would he. After another screaming match, Tony realized now that not only was he staying awake to ease his guilt, but also for Peter. The kid would get chills, start tremble and breath faster whenever he felt like he was falling asleep. The lights had dimmed even more to the point where Tony could barely see him but he knew when Peter was starting to panic as his eyes started to close. He wanted the kid to sleep so bad, but he knew that the minute the kid's chin hit his chest that noise would go off and put the teen in an extreme amount of pain.

Hours and hours of that went by, until Peter finally said, "I'm good. You can at least take a couple minutes, since you only care about yourself."

Tony analyzed the sentence; they had gotten decently good at doing that. As an example, Tony was about to ask Peter if he was okay when the kid started an argument, emphasizing the part on where he said that Damian was stalking them probably with some sort of camera. That meant Peter knew there was a camera and they couldn't blow their cover. Stuff like that happened every couple of minutes, just exchanged, pissed off gazes that were practically novels. They couldn't say what they meant outright, so they embedded it within sentences that would have hurt under other circumstances.

In this case, Peter meant he was fine, and that he could stay awake on his own. Tony wouldn't have agreed but there was a begging in his voice that pleaded with Tony to get at least a minute of sleep. The second part was added on because of their agreement, but Tony didn't skip over the slight twinge of hate. Some part of Peter still thought Tony stayed up for selfish reasons, not to keep him safe, and that made Tony uneasy. He wasn't faking something; he legitimately hated Tony for a reason unknown to him, and he needed to find out what that was. But anyway, after Peter's demand, Tony finally stopped fighting the effects of the drugs, let his eyes close, and fell asleep.

What seemed like ten minutes later, all the lights were suddenly turned on to a blinding brightness. Just as he opened his eyes and squinted with a groan, he was hit with a splash of water that drenched him instantly. Tony spluttered in shock and his chin jerked up, spitting icy water out of his face and shaking drops from his hair as it stuck to his forehead. He groaned and blinked harshly, taking a shuddery breath as he flexed his tied hands behind him. His shirt was soaked and water pooled on the floor beneath him, drops running down his legs and building in his shoes.

"If I wanted a shower, I would have asked for one," Tony smiled fakely to the man along side him with an empty bucket.

Damian patted him on the shoulder and Tony shrugged his hand off. The man shook his head with a small chuckle as he set the bucket down. Then he pointed to Peter and said in disbelief, "Are you two like...the same person?"

Tony frowned, looking at Peter for an answer in genuine confusion, "Why?"

"Because I said that same thing a couple days ago," Peter grumbled in explanation, shivering.

It was right then that Tony noticed Peter was shaking, his shirt also soaked, water running down his face. He looked for the second bucket to see where Damian had stashed it but when he didn't see one he motioned forward, still trying to figure out what was going on, "What, he get you before me?"

Peter shook his head and looked up pointedly That's when Tony saw the slow trickle of water. He followed it to the ceiling where there was a pipe that ran along the wall. He looked back down in disbelief. The kid made a face, his teeth slight chattering. "Cold shower, remember?"

Tony realized it had probably been on all night, he just didn't see it. Anger curled into a knot in his stomach and Tony dug his nails hard into his palms behind his back, giving Peter a look that was both apologetic and pissed that he wasn't told sooner. He smiled fakely, "Nice."

"Sorry for the water Tony, I just thought you and Peter should twin," Damian grinned. "You've been doing that a lot lately."

"Oh, have we?" Tony rolled his eyes.

"Yeah. You want to hear some of the highlights? Besides the similar look and the sarcasm and the face you're giving me right now," he smirked. "You both said a line about chick flicks in the exact same circumstance, you've both spoken at the same time on multiple occasions *and*," he raised a finger, "you both nicknamed me Dames. How coincidental is that?"

"Pretty coincidental. There weren't many more options for a crappy name like yours," Tony shrugs.

"Damie," Peter suggests.

"Good one," Tony admits.

Damian sighed and planted his feet, clasping his hands and looking back and forth, "How was your night's sleep? Peter...you didn't get much did you?"

"Well how about you let me blow a whistle in your ear whenever your eyes start to droop, see how you like it," Peter snarled sarcastically.

Damian patted him on the knee and Peter flinched. Tony tensed at the man touching the kid and

wished he could rip Damian's hand off. But then when the man turned to Tony he acted like he didn't have a care in the world. Damian winked, "You dosed off for a bit though, didn't ya?"

"Do you want an award for being observant?" Tony asked, but he allowed Peter to see a flicker of guilt when Damian wasn't looking. If Peter hadn't said anything he probably would have stayed up, but the kid's demand combined with not sleeping well for the past...three months had something to do with it. "It's not like I could where you're making the kid scream every four seconds."

"Why, because you care about him?" Damian smirked.

Tony scoffed, "No, because it's loud, genius."

"Well aren't you two a sarcastic duo today?" Damian laughed.

Tony narrowed his eyes, "Are we just here so you can write a compare and contrast paper or are you gonna tell us what you want?"

Damian nodded, clasping his hands, "I'll get to that. That's why I'm here."

"Wait, no fair!" Peter complains. "I've been here a week and get jack squat, Tony's here not even a day and all of a sudden you spill your guts? What's up with that?"

"I'm sorry if I offended you, but yes," Damian nods with a small smile. "We're gonna talk business today."

"Talk," Tony snorted, shifting in his seat. "Yeah right."

Damian pointed at him, "You read me like a book. Don't act like it's a shock. What I want you won't give me willingly, so I'll skip the 'asking nicely' part."

"I don't think his mom taught him manners," Peter whispered to Tony who allowed him a smirk in return.

For now they were on the same side. He could play this off. He was nearly 100% sure Peter understood what he was trying to say last night. They needed to act like they hated each other for Damian to give up trying to use them as a weakness. Tony would apologize later, but he would do whatever it took to get Peter out of there alive, even if that meant pouring salt in some already open wounds. Hurt was better than dead. He didn't think that the kid would have a problem with acting like he hated him either, because Tony knew a part of him still did. They had a lot to work out, and much more fighting to get through, but he wanted them out of here first- that was his main priority. So while they were in here, he planned on keeping Peter safe.

"Dames, were you dropped as a baby?" Tony asked, cocking his head. The man didn't answer. Instead he was humming King Of Pain, off key, Tony might add. "The Police? Really?" he snorted. Damian again didn't answer and after another minute of the song Tony rolled his eyes and audibly groaned. "Peter, shut him up. Make him stop, please."

"You think he listens to me?" Peter demanded. "It's a miracle we've gotten this far. Why don't you get into an argument with him?" Peter suggested with a glare that didn't seem faked. "That will shut him up."

"Oh, come on, kid," Tony swore. He and Peter locked gazes and the looks they gave each other were filled with true anger. Tony shifted uncomfortably; this was going to be a long day. He truly hadn't mustered a lot to fake the gaze; it came naturally, and by the convincing flash in Peter's eyes, he figured the kid didn't have to try that hard either. They had simply given each other a free

pass to saying things they didn't mean, or maybe what Peter had always wanted to say. That probably wasn't the best idea.

"You guys didn't make much progress last night, did ya?" Damian interrupts.

"Shut up!" Peter and Tony snapped at him, glancing at each other's synchronization.

Damian put his hands up in surrender and pulled a chair forward, fingering a knife. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "Look guys. Here's what I want. Tony, you have access to a lot of servers, you know contacts, you know locations and missions, you've got nuclear codes-"

"Woah," Tony laughed at the man's boldness and stupidity. "You think I know nuclear codes? I'm not the President."

"No, no, of course not," Damian laughed and lowered his head. "But if you really really wanted to put that brilliant mind to work, you could hack anything you wanted to."

"Don't flatter yourself," Tony hissed, but the man was right; he had hacked into the Pentagon on a dare in high school.

Peter grinned. "Looks like you've got an admirer," he whispered to Tony, snickering. Damian turns to Peter who wiggles his eyebrows at him and straightens cockily, "What have you got for me good sir?"

Damian smiles calmly, "Well you've been in the compound too. You and Tony were pretty close so I'm sure you got access to some super cool Avengers stuff. I can divvy up some of the more...simple crap when I get bored of Tony. Then I'm gonna make good money off of ya. There are some people who would pay to get in a beating or two...some old friends you landed behind bars. They're out now. Been hiding in the shadows, but man, do they have a bone to pick with you."

Peter gulped, straightening in his chair. As Spiderman, he put away a lot of criminals, with and without Tony's help. Fear flashed through the kid's gaze, and Tony hated it. The kid was probably thinking of his worst enemies, people that Tony knew would kill to land a punch on the kid that made a fool of them and ruined their plans of death and destruction, all while sprouting sarcastic quips in a red and blue onesie.

Tony scoffed loudly, to mask him actually shooting Peter a small look of support, "So you have other bad guys do your dirty work for you? Nice."

Damian ignored him, sensing Peter's worry as well and a smile grew on his face. He only had eyes for Peter who hesitantly met his gaze. "That's right Spiderman. I'm giving them a chance to get back at you, under the radar, with no repercussions. They won't kill you, of course. Because I have another deal with HYDRA." He enjoyed the shocked look on the kid's face and nodded, whispering happily, "After I'm done with you, I'll hand you over to them for a generous sum. A kid like you with the powers you've got?" He whistled and leaned back in his chair, "They were pretty excited when I proposed my plan."

He tapped the flat of his blade on Peter's knee and the kid winced. Then Damian shrugged and sighed, "Or I may just kill you." The teen blanched and didn't answer, swallowing and pressing his lips together.

Tony jerked on his ropes; he couldn't stop himself. Luckily Damian didn't see but a small part of Tony wished he would. He wanted the man to know that if he laid a hand on the kid, he would pay,

and that he would have to go through Tony if he wanted to take Peter anywhere. Close to screaming, he composed himself with effort, knowing it would blow his cover, and that it would be an empty threat since he was a little tied up at the moment.

He curled his fists and looked Peter dead in the eye, the kid looking back at him. Tony dove past the hate and anger, burying all the way down past the pain until he got to the vulnerable, innocent, kid. And he made a silent promise to the him, hoping it still meant as much as it did before, even though part of him knew it didn't.

"But that comes later," Damian announced, snapping Peter and Tony's gazes apart. "Today it's just us," he said happily, as if that would make them feel better.

"Wuppie," Peter mumbled.

"Oh joy," Tony grinned sarcastically. "So, what's first? You sing Message in a Bottle as off key as you did the other song and I might have to tell you everything," he admitted weakly.

"Funny," Damian chuckled. "We'll start small. And we'll take breaks. I've got all the time in the world."

"Do you?" Tony asked, narrowing his eyes. Damian glanced at him and scoffed and a small smile grew on Tony's face. "You take a highschooler, not many people notice, that I get." Tony purposely avoided the kid's eye contact because he knew in his heart that Peter winced and that wasn't something he wanted to see.

"But you kidnap Iron Man and think the world keeps turning? You've got limited time before my team finds me. You know that. Yes, I'm getting under your skin," Tony nodded, speaking through gritted teeth and breathing hard. He hadn't blinked and his voice was deadly calm. "So cut the confident, cocky, I'm on top of the world crap, because you're not. You're scared, because deep down you know there's a chance your massive plan could fail and you'll be put behind bars for the rest of your life. You're on a clock, so don't think you can intimidate me with your little power game."

Damian stared at him for a second and then nodded. "Okay," he said. Then in one fluid motion he got up and went over to Peter, shoving his sleeve up before making a cut on his arm. Peter yelped, jerking away, more in shock than pain and Tony swore.

"What the hell?" Tony demanded.

Damian shrugged, "You were right. I shouldn't waste my time. So I need the access code to your security system for the compound."

Tony scoffed, "Look, he's probably still wearing Underoos, okay? And you're holding a knife to him."

"Screw you, Tony," Peter snarled. Damian slit Peter's cheek without even looking, keeping his gaze focused on Tony. Peter's nose scrunched up and he exhaled sharply with a wince, but nothing more. His foot was shaking ever so lightly, his shoe tapping against the ground.

It killed him inside, Tony forced a smile. "You think hurting the kid is gonna make me tell you?" It took everything in Tony not to wince as the kid's shoulders tensed, pain evident in his gaze as his jaw clenched. Tony sighed, "Look, you don't believe me. So you're gonna keep making paper cuts until I break and then tell you the code and then you'll laugh in my face, right? That's what you're envisioning?" Tony shook his head, "Yeah, sorry buddy, I'll save you the trouble. Call me

heartless, I don't care, but that kid is not gonna be used as a bargaining chip against me."

"Yeah, because you only cared about me when it fit your agenda, huh?" Peter snarled, blood dripping down his cheek. Tony flinched a slight bit; this wasn't the first time he felt like he was missing something. He was out of the loop. Damian did something to Peter, told him or showed him something, before he got there, that Peter was holding against him. There was something in his voice, an ounce of sincerity that scared him, and he intended on finding out what it was, but he couldn't worry about that right now.

"Cry me a river," Tony scoffed, rolling his eyes. "You want to twist my words again? Damian, you want some real answers, maybe try your little tactic on him and hurt me, because I think Peter's still soft." He prayed it would work, because then he would be the one getting cut up instead of the kid.

"Shut up," Peter hissed, glaring at him fiercely as he lurched in his cuffs. "I want nothing to do with you."

Tony shook his head, "Yeah, I've heard that one before but here we are."

"Because you had to play hero!" Peter yelled.

"Oh my God, both of you," Damian groaned, pressing his hands to his temples. "I can't think, I can't even think."

The kid narrowed his eyes muttered a curse at him and Tony hid a smile. It was instantly killed when Damian ruffled Peter's curls, provoking an f bomb from the teenager, something that was rare in his vocabulary. Tony felt a boiling rage in his chest.

Damian turned back to Tony and asked calmly, "The code, please."

Tony shrugged, "To be honest? I don't actually know it. It changes every once in a while- company policy, and I just get let in because..." he grins, "I'm Iron Man."

"Oh," Damian nods in assurance. "Don't worry, I understand." He moves the knife forward and makes a cut on Peter's collarbone. The kid lets out a muffled groan after he takes a breath, his legs digging into the ground until Damian pulls the knife away. Peter let out a small noise of pain, shifting in his seat with blood trickling down the center of his shoulder.

"How you doing Peter?" Damian asked. The kid glared at him and didn't answer, his nostrils flaring and the man smiled, giving his shoulder a pat before he turned to Tony and sighed, "Let's try something you do know then."

"Thank you," Tony said sincerely. "Dumbing it down for me, I appreciate it. No matter that my IQ is probably 200 points higher than you-"

Damian gripped the knife and Tony instantly stopped talking before realizing that was probably the most telling thing he could have done. If Damian noticed, he didn't say anything. Instead, he shrugged, "List any contact you have in the black market. I know you've got people planted."

Tony frowned, "You want me to remember exact names when I barely remember what I had for breakfast yesterday? I thought this was supposed to be an easier one. Skip."

"I think I've given you proper motivation. I'm holding a knife to a sixteen year old, Tony," Damian said, just resting the knife in an already open wound, going deeper. The kid trembled when Damian applied pressure, the tip dancing in the cut and splitting skin as blood spilled over the

sides.

"God, you suck, you know that?" Those were the kid's first words in a while and they were filled with a mix of annoyance and anger, which was telling of his high pain tolerance. Peter arched in the chair with a muffled cry of pain, his head thrown back as he closed his eyes and held his breath, his body jerking with every movement Damian made carelessly with the knife.

Tony swallowed and faked another smile, "Yeah, well what can I say? The kid and I have got a history, and we've got a crap ton of issues." He took one glance at Peter and wished he hadn't. Tears were building in the kid's eyes but the minute he caught Tony watching he blinked them away. Damian moved backward and the kid thankfully drank in a shaky breath as the pain subsided.

"Look, Tony, it doesn't make sense," Damian laughed, crouching by Peter's side and motioning with the knife. The kid's eyes watched the tip warily, wincing and letting out a pained laugh and a threat each time it nicked his knee. "Either there's something really, and I mean really, messed up between the two of you," he shakes his head in disbelief, "or letting this kid get hurt is the last thing you want. You must be so hell bent on convincing me you hate him so that I can't use him against you. Because this is some next level crap. You both are sincerely dedicated either way, I'll give you that. But I will give you one more chance to come clean and tell me which one it is."

Tony stared at him and took a big sigh. "Well you won't listen to me. Ask the kid, maybe you'll believe him."

Damian considered that and rested his elbow on Peter's knee. Blood dropped off the knife and pooled on the floor. Damian shrugged, "Alright Pete, talk to me, kid. Convince me."

Peter glared at him and took a deep breath. "You said I thought of Tony like my father, right? You think that's why I didn't correct him? Him calling me Pete has nothing to do with what I think of him. You ever consider the fact that it might have been because I was just a little shocked to see him?" Peter swore, before he leveled his gaze. "He is not my father, he has never been my father, and he will never be my father," Peter said lowly. "I couldn't care less about him. Like I said, we're broken. He betrayed my trust, he kicked me to the curb, and he ruined my life so tell me...why should I care what you to do him?"

"Gotcha. Okay. Yeah, that makes sense actually," Damian nodded thoughtfully before he stood. "So this doesn't bother you?" He slammed his fist into Tony's jaw before he could even brace. His head snapped back and Tony groaned, tasting blood. His lip was busted and Tony winced, bringing his chin back, seeing spots, only to get another hit, this one in the chest that sent the chair moving back an inch. Tony spit up blood and weakly raised his gaze to see Peter's expression hadn't changed.

The kid smiled, "Not in the slightest. For all I care, he can go to hell."

Damain crouched by Tony's side and grabbed his chin, turning it towards him and whispering, "Harsh."

"You didn't even punch that hard. He deserves worse." Peter locked eyes with Damian who was watching him carefully. The teen leaned forward and spoke through gritted teeth, "You wanted to know which one it was? I'll tell you. There's something really, and I mean really," Peter quoted fiercely, not even blinking as he spoke calmly, "messed up between the two of us. So do whatever you want. You won't get squat from me because of him."

Damian nodded thoughtfully, fingering the knife while he kept his gaze on Peter. "Okay," he said

simply before he gripped the knife and drove the wooden hilt into Tony's stomach, making him double over in pain. While he was hunched over his knees, trying to gasp in breaths, Damian got behind him and took hold of his shoulder, reaching and pressing the tip of the knife into Tony's gunshot wound. His other hand pushed his shoulder in a very unnatural position.

Tony cried out in shock, thrashing away but Damian tightened his grip and held him in place, holding it so hard he bruised the skin. He dug the knife in more and blood spilled down his shirt. Tony grit his teeth and tossed his head back and forth in pain, his eyes shut tight. He gasped for breath before he clamped his lips shut, afraid a scream would burst through.

"How does that feel Tony?" Damian hissed.

Tony cried out at the beginning of his answer, "Like- like you're digging a knife into my arm, thanks for asking-" he yelled and exhaled hard from his nose.

"Here's what's gonna happen, Peter. You're gonna tell me the truth," Damian sighed, giving the hilt a twist as he drove it further into Tony's bullet wound. Tony exhaled sharply as Damian adjusted his grip on his shoulder and started pushing it harder the wrong way, still digging the end of the knife into it. "Or I'm gonna push his shoulder a little too much in the wrong direction and he might get a stab wound in the process."

"When you are gonna learn you idiot," Tony coughed out a laugh. Damian slammed the edge of the knife into Tony's face, blood smearing on his cheek. He pressed harder on his shoulder and Tony cried out, hearing a small crack. Despite the pain, he still spit out, "He doesn't. Give a flying crap. About me."

"Peter, speak now or forever hold your peace," Damian sighed.

Peter had steeled his expression and Tony met it with a fierce glare, but underneath was a message. *It's fine*. He could handle this. Peter took a deep breath and sighed, his voice surprisingly calm as he addressed Damian. "You done chasing dead ends?"

"Last chance, kid," Damian warned, sinking the knife deeper into Tony's shoulder as he pressed against it. Tony was forcefully bent at this point from the awkward angle, his shoulder threatening to pop out of his socket, the knife moving around in his shoulder, ripping tissue and making blood soak his shirt. Tony tensed in the chair, biting his lip hard as pain took over his whole left side. His shoulder felt like it was on fire, the bone barely holding together from the pressure. He gasped for breath and held his breath, his ears starting to ring.

"Did you not hear me the first time? I'll simplify it for you. Bite me," Peter snarled, sinking into the chair definitely before he smirked. "Better yet, bite him."

"Have it your way," Damian snarled as he jerked Tony's shoulder once. The crack was audible and Tony cried out in pain, his breath sucked from his lungs. But that twitch sent his shoulder forward and the knife sank into his arm almost up to the hilt. It went in so smoothly Tony was almost surprised. He felt the rip of his muscle and the skin break. He...felt it...in his arm.

The fire rippled down his shoulder and Tony's fingers twitched as he shoved his head up and gasped, gulping down air, shock kicking in. Damian patted him on his bad shoulder, making Tony hiss in pain as the knife moved around inside his arm. Damian grinned, flicking it once and Tony choked on his pain, his legs tensing and kicking not on his own accord. The knife was finally yanked out, slicing his skin a second time, blood pouring out. Tony slumped forward, letting out small noises of pain through gritted teeth, before he finally raised his gaze weakly, fire flashing in his eyes.

"How...am I supposed to give you the finger now if I can't lift my arm?" Tony murmured through the blinding pain that threatened to overtake his swimming vision.

"Don't worry. It's not life threatening. I dislocated and fractured one of the more painful bones," Damian assured him. "You'll still be able to move your arm."

Tony took deep breaths and raised his gaze, blood dripping from his chin, "You learn that in psycho school too?"

Damian laughed, looking down with a sigh. "I've got to hand it to you boys."

"You believe us now?" Peter said breathlessly, doing everything in his power to avoid looking at Tony who was resting his busted shoulder against his chest and trying not to make any more sounds of pain, his entire left side covered in blood from how deep Damian dug in the knife. Peter wasn't looking too good either; small cuts scattered across his body leaking red into his wet shirt.

"No," Damian smiled.

"You son of a-

"What the hell is wrong with you-"

Tony and Peter both immediately started screaming in anger and Damian quieted them down. "Listen, listen. Let's say you are telling the truth and really do hate each other."

"Well I was wrong. Your IQ is higher than 1 for recognizing what's right in front of you," Tony snarled, his vision white with pain.

"But how would I tell the difference between that and you being the most important thing in the world to each other?"

"Oh my GOD!" Peter laughed mockingly, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Never mind about your IQ," Tony muttered.

Damian smiled at the both of them, "It's sweet, really. So between those two, I'm kind of stuck," he held up a finger and sighed. "Lucky for you, I've come to realize that Tony was right. I don't have time for this. You both are so stubborn, you're not gonna give in, and that means I'm just gonna waste my day to what," he laughed, "prove my point? Because I have a theory."

"Oh, he's got a theory," Peter says to no one in particular.

"It better be formatted as an if and when statement," Tony mumbled, spitting out blood.

Damian kicked the leg of his chair faster than Tony's expected and he hit the ground hard on his side, right on his bad arm. Tony cried out in sync with Peter who got a nasty punch to the jaw. Damian's knuckles came away bleeding. He went over to pick Tony's chair up, pulling his bad arm, which made the man cry out in pain.

Tony groaned as he was rightened and Damian stuck a finger in his face. "I could break you...but I don't want to put in the effort. So it's gonna go on the back burner for now."

"Were you expecting a parade and a sign from above that confirms we hate each other? The kid just let you break my shoulder and drive a knife through my arm," Tony snapped, anger fueling his adrenaline. "He obviously doesn't care about me."

"Well glad you finally realized it," Peter smiled fakely. "Cause I'm just being honest."

"Oh I realized it a long time ago, but you just flattered yourself too much. I didn't break that easy," Tony snarled.

"Damian I think you should tape his mouth shut next time," Peter suggested.

Damian was watching with a sick grin on his face and he pointed at Peter, "I'll keep that in mind. Anyway, Peter, I feel like it should be your turn. How do you feel about a little waterboarding?" he asked with a smile.

Tony froze. No. Not the kid. He cursed inwardly; he wasn't about to let the kid go anywhere with that man. Peter tensed and didn't have a comeback ready. Damian laughed and started forward and Peter shoved himself as far back in the chair as he could, his face scrunching up in fear.

Out of options, Tony he did the only think he could think of. He let the flashbacks of Afghanistan wash over and he sucked in a shaky breath, loud enough that Damian could hear it just as he reached for the kid's collar. Peter stifled a sigh of relief as the hand recoiled and his gaze shifted over to Tony in confusion.

Damian froze and then turned around slowly. Tony purposely avoided eye contact, his leg shaking ever so slightly since he wasn't concentrating on stopping it. The man grinned and straightened, beginning to saunter over, "Tony, a little antsy there?"

"I just got my freaking shoulder popped out and a knife through my arm, how do you think I'm doing?" he snapped, but he made sure Damian saw the edge in his eyes.

The man crouched and met his gaze and Tony allowed some fear to seep in. "No, no, that's not it." Damian shook his head and pointed at him like he had just won a prize. "I think waterboarding hits a little close to home."

"Screw you," Tony scoffed furiously, his voice wavering. "You don't know anything about me."

Peter had realized what he was doing and he gave Tony a glare that said *no*. But the man's mind was set. Yes, this scared him more than anything. Yes, he still woke up with nightmares. Yes, he knew how to survive this. And yes, he was doing this because he wasn't letting the kid get hurt because of him, not then, not now, not ever again.

"Ten Rings kidnapped you back in 08. Tortured you for a couple months. And I bet..." Damian whispered, searching Tony's gaze with a twisted smirk, "that you still have nightmares of being shoved under water until you feel it trickling down your throat, am I right?"

Tony was breathing hard. It didn't take much to fake, it was more just letting it show. Peter struggled weakly behind them as Tony met Damian's eyes and his voice cracked softly, "I'll say it once and I'll say it again. Screw you."

Damian grabbed his collar and hauled him from the chair, punching him straight across the face. Tony hit the ground hard, on his bad shoulder and he cried out in pain, rolling over to ease the tension. Blood pooled and smeared the floor where he had fallen. For a brief second, he met Peter's gaze. The kid was staring at him and in that moment, a thousand words were spoken in a single gaze. Tony gave him a subtle nod and Peter clenched his jaw.

Then a hand grabbed a fist of his hair and his bad shoulder and hauled him up and Tony was torn away and shoved through the door, Peter left alone.

"How are you gonna hide that big shield going through the lobby?" Rhodes demanded as they parked the car next to Peter's apartment building.

"I'll just hope no one sees it. Some people aren't observant," Steve said, opening the door and flipping the shield to the dull side, Rhodey walking beside him to cover some of it. They walked awkwardly to the stairs but luckily the only person in the room was the man at the desk and he was on the phone. They snuck into the stairs with a sigh of relief and Rhodey pulled out his gun, putting a hand to his glasses.

"I got my suit on standby outside of Peter's window. There are no heat signatures that they can sense." They made their way up the flights of steps, checking to see if anyone was following them. There were no bugs on the staircase either.

"Yeah, but that could mean FRIDAY didn't sense them with Tony," Steve pointed out, opening the door to the hallway and cautiously stepping through the door. He and Rhodey approached Peter's room and turned the handle. It was locked and Steve looked around before muttering, "Sorry May."

He slammed the shield down on the handle, breaking it off before he pushed the door open. Rhodey leveled his gun as Steve readied his shield, but the room was dark and empty. They walked in and flicked on the lights, Rhodey keeping his finger off the trigger as he closed the door behind him.

The kitchen was messy, but everything in the main room was normal. There was a blanket on the couch, the remotes laying dormant on the sides. Steve pointed forward and said, "Tony didn't go without a fight."

They approached the hallway which was a slight mess, the carpet twisted, the wall scraped, a picture frame broken.

"There's Peter's room," Rhodey says, taking the turn and entering carefully, gun trained on the walls and corners. He motioned for Steve to continue checking and he kicked open the kid's closet. Nothing there. Lowering the gun he went over to Peter's desk and saw a few of the drawers slightly open.

He yanked the handle and crouched, shuffling through the books. Rhodey swore he saw a picture of Peter and Tony underneath some chem text books and after taking some of the texts out and laying them elsewhere, he was right. Steve entered the room and Rhodey held it up, "Poor kid. He must have had it rough."

"We all did," Steve said sadly. "But right now we need to find them. Is there something-" Steve's gaze snapped to the side; a small piece of paper on the ground caught his attention. Steve unwrapped it and his heart sank.

"Steve I-" Rhodey stood before he saw Cap's expression. "What?" he asked.

Steve's voice broke and he whispered, "Read it. That's Peter's handwriting."

Rhodey took a couple seconds, his face falling. "Where was this?" he demanded. Steve pointed to the middle of the floor and nodded before he could even say what he was going to say. "If Peter wrote this and Tony found it, that would catch him off guard. Perfect time to strike."

"But FRIDAY was shut down, when?" Steve asked.

"He had a gun with him, so my guess is he read the letter and then went into the hallway, about to leave, and got jumped," Rhodey ran a hand over his face. "Crap."

"Crap is right," Steve sighed, digging his phone out of his pocket. He called the lab and asked, "No sign of who took them. Please tell me one of you has one."

"Well I talked to my contacts and they say that nothing about Tony has come up on the radio, but there is some stuff about Spiderman."

Steve frowned, "Who would want the kid?"

Rhodey snorted, "You kidding me? HYDRA would kill to get his hands on him."

"Not just HYDRA. Criminals too. We've had a bunch of Raft breakouts over the years. All put there by the same person."

Steve's face fell and he muttered, "Peter."

"Exactly. They've always wanted revenge and now they're gonna get it, without repercussions. FRIDAY and I are compiling a list as we speak."

"He won't kill them," Rhodey said firmly. "Whoever kidnapped Peter and Tony has a personality. They're cocky, and they know what they're doing. Meaning even if they're rushed knowing we're onto them, neither will die."

"Yeah," Steve said slowly, "but what they're doing to them could be worse. Nat, you get anything else out of your contacts?"

"I asked nicely and they gave me an IP address, but it's following the same route as the tracker, bouncing off satellites. So we'll let you know when we make progress on that," she said proudly.

Rhodey cracked a smile, "And your contacts...are they still alive and kicking?"

Nat paused and Clint answered, *"Yeah, after a year in the hospital they'll be just fine."*

Steve smirked. "When you get a name, let us know."

"Will do. Handing you over to Wanda," Nat announced.

"Hey guys," Wanda said, and both Steve and Rhodey knew it wasn't going to be the best news. *"We've got a undercover team on May. She hasn't suspected anything yet. As far as she knows, Peter is still sick and doesn't have a phone. We've intercepted more emails sent to her from both Peter's school and friends, all supporting their claims. It's one massive spiderweb with no flaws."*

"Great," Rhodey cursed. "What about leads. Camera footage?"

"We've narrowed it down to a twenty mile radius from where I last tracked the sim card. They drove a minute before snapping it," Clint said proudly.

"Then we'll get one camera shoot, identify the truck, and see if we can track it," Vision said.

"But we can't even be sure we're right on this one, I mean, come on guys, a van with tinted windows is a vehicle that stands out. Right now we're hoping they're dumb enough to have used that." That was Bruce, and it was unfortunately, a valid point.

"Yeah, or that they think they've taken enough precautions and know that we'd have hours of

camera footage to look through," Steve said with a sigh, trying to stay somewhat positive, rubbing a hand over his head. "Does anyone have any good news?"

"The abandoned and owned warehouse buildings list is longer than the biggest Harry Potter book, going back years," Bucky sighed. "So unless we know what we're looking for, it's like trying to find a haystack in a pile of haystacks."

"It's needle in a pile of needles, genius," Sam corrected.

"Shut up."

"I said good news," Steve groaned weakly.

"None of that."

"Nope."

"And I haven't even looked at the press yet," Steve groaned to Rhodey, shifting his weight from foot to foot.

Rhodey shook his head, "It's been quiet. No one really knows."

"Yeah, including the board. Should we tell them?"

"No," Rhodey said firmly. "Look, I'm all for being diplomatic, but none of them can help or keep their mouths shut. We've been keeping it tight and I think it should stay that way."

"Agreed," Steve nodded firmly. "So basically we have all dead ends and the only way we can figure out where the heck to even begin is with time, something that Tony and Peter don't have."

"You're the one who wanted to stay positive," Nat grumbled over the line.

Steve ran a hand through his hair again and stuttered, "Ok- we're gonna do one more sweep, ask around, and then we'll head back. Call us if you find anything."

"On it. Out."

Steve shut the phone and slipped it back into his pocket. Rhodey looked around and took a deep breath, "We'll find them. It's Tony and Peter."

"You say that like it's a saving grace, which it *was*. But not anymore. Those two are gonna be at each other's throats, but I know they would still die for each other," Steve hissed. "Help me with the desk, there may be something under here."

"Yeah, but you said it yourself, they won't kill them," Rhodey said firmly. "They won't. I hate to say it, but they both know too much."

Steve slid the desk over while Rhodey made sure nothing fell. He yanked out what was underneath and saw a dead Iron Man gauntlet, the circle in the middle of the palm dark. He held it up for Rhodey. "We need to find them. Now."

Peter was curled on the floor, with his hands clenched over his legs by the corner. He was nursing hurt ribs and what was probably a sprained ankle. He had already snapped a finger back. Although Tony had taken the worse punishment, Peter hadn't been in the clear. They had kept him occupied

for about an hour and a half. He ached all over, and could barely move without sharp pain rippling through his body. At least he was out of the chair though...that was something. But he was nowhere close to full strength. He hadn't known how long he had been sitting here waiting for someone to come back, only that Tony had been gone the whole time. Peter shouldn't have let him go with Damian, he cursed himself for that, but he knew he had no choice.

There was a sound in the hallway and Peter's head snapped up, his eyes narrowing. He shivered and flicked his cold bangs away from his eyes, waiting for someone to enter. The door unlocked and opened, but only one came in. And by came in, he meant two men were dragging someone and they tossed him to the floor like a ragdoll. Tony landed on his side, unmoving, sliding a couple feet forward, leaving behind a smear of blood.

The men left as soon as they came and Peter looked up from where he was and called in a rather monotone voice, "Tony."

No answer. Peter frowned before he cursed, realizing it didn't even look like he was breathing. Tony's chest wasn't rising or falling and Peter's gaze instantly snapped into focus. He sprung to his feet, ignoring the sharp pain in his ankle. "Tony? If you're screwing with me, I swear to God-"

Nothing. He wasn't breathing. Peter pushed off the wall, his head pounding as he took a step on his bad ankle, barely feeling the pain. He sprinted over and dropped to his knees by Tony, rolling him onto his side. The man's head fell limp into his hands, his face slack, bangs stuck to his forehead. It was the first physical contact Peter had had with him in three months, and if he was honest? He would have rather taken a beating from him then this- cupping the cold cheek of the man as he searched for a pulse.

There were burns and cuts on his wrists from how hard he had been straining on the ropes and Peter's heart clenched. Each time Damian had dragged the knife down his chest, arm, whatever, he had saw Tony's shoulders set back, but he never thought that he would be twisting his hands around, in a desperate attempt to help. His shoulder was badly stitched up, definitely going to be infected and the stitches were loose, barely holding the skin together. Blood still seeped from it and from the looks of it, his shoulder was still dislocated.

More of a reason why he was currently terrified. Not finding a pulse, Peter slapped him in the face, fisting his shirt that was soaking wet and shaking him. He cursed wildly and in a moment of panic, slammed a hand against his chest. He had never been so scared. The fact that Tony was dying in his arms sent fear ripping through his body and he couldn't even see straight. He needed him to wake up. He needed him. He couldn't do this without him. Trying to not let the desperation show, he slammed the edge of his hand into the center of his chest again.

"Come on, breathe," he demanded fiercely, hitting him again. Peter slammed his palm harder and after the fourth hit, Tony jerked in his grasp, and Peter instinctively put his arm out to shelter him, sinking down at his side as the man fell onto his hands and knees. Tony spluttered and coughed before he collapsed, Peter doing his best to catch him and ease him down. At his touch, Tony's eyes flying open as he tipped onto his side and retched, coughing up water while cradling his bad shoulder. His other hand found Peter's arm and as he threw up water he curled his fingers around Peter's sleeve, gasping for breath.

Peter let out a small sigh of relief, staying by his side, his shoulders relaxing. Tony was shaking and spluttering, not even able to take a full breath and Peter's eyes stung as he forced his voice not to shake. He wasn't ok. Tony wasn't ok.

"Easy," Peter demanded, putting a hesitant hand on his back. The minute he could breathe, or at least knew where he was, Tony smacked him off and scrambled away, eyes lit up with fear. It

seemed more like an instinct to just get away, but they used to know each other better than that. Peter put up his hands in surrender and understanding, staying where he was in caution. Tony was still pushing himself backward, his hands shaking, a look in his eyes that Peter had seen many times when they both went up to the roof and just sat in silence because of the terrors they had woken up from. They made eye contact and then avoided it every couple of seconds. Peter sighed, the protectiveness and worry fading quickly as they both remembered the past three months. "It's just me," Peter muttered sadly, his voice cracking.

Tony hit the back wall and sucked in a large shaky breath, blood trickling over the knuckles of his hand that he had pressed to his shoulder. He nodded after a second of panicked silence and rasped an apologetic, "Yeah."

Of everything that had just happened, those four words had hurt them both more than others would realize.

"You're welcome for just saving your life," Peter snapped.

Tony shot him a look, "Thank you. I'm sure you were pretty conflicted."

"I was," Peter gave him a fake smile.

They both sat in silence for a bit, Peter watching Tony every chance he could to make sure he was okay. He was holding his chest, wincing in pain, his breathing still not back to normal. He was starting to shiver, drenched from head to toe in water, and Peter then noticed a few more cuts and bruises that hadn't been there before.

"You good?" Peter asked eventually, an edge of nervousness in his voice.

Tony gulped down a breath and coughed up more water, his breath rattling in his lungs. Peter winced at that. Then Tony shrugged, "Yeah." That was a lie. He swallowed painfully, running a hand over his wet face. Then he looked over Peter and saw all the bruises. His face fell and there was a horrified look in his eyes. "They didn't leave you alone," he said quietly, his voice breaking as he started using it again.

Peter scoffed, not wanting to discuss that. Instead he nodded before muttering, "Did you give him-"

"What he wanted? Which was to hack into nuclear codes? No, I didn't. I'm not an idiot," Tony said firmly, shooting him a look.

"Good," Peter said, with a bite in his voice. "Because I know we hate each other, but we have to work together on this one. He can't know anything."

Tony looked up and locked eyes with him, nodding slowly. His voice sobered and their eyes shone with agreement. "Yeah, I know, kid."

Peter snorted and weakly pushed himself to the opposite wall, clasping his hands over his legs that he pulled to his chest, muttering, "Yeah, I knew you wouldn't have a problem with that."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tony demanded instantly, his voice gaining back its strength despite still shaking.

"If it comes between me or giving him something he wants, I just wanted to let you know you should let me get hurt. I guess I just figured you'd have a few morals left, but I see I was wrong," Peter sniffed, avoiding eye contact.

"You were the one who let him stab me and break my shoulder," Tony reminded him.

Peter scowled and shook his head, "What, did I hurt your feelings? You honestly think that I would give a crap about your shoulder after what you did?"

"Here you go again, picking a fight," Tony said, pressing a hand to his head.

"Darn right I'm picking a fight!" Peter yelled. "You're selfish and impulsive. You're reckless, Tony," he sneered, hate seeping through his gaze. "And if you're not careful you're gonna get us killed."

"I'm gonna?" Tony spluttered, coughing on his weakened lungs. "You were the one who-"

"What?" Peter demanded, "I was the one who got kidnapped? I already apologized for that, because apparently that's a crime, so cuff me officer," he spit before getting to his feet. "What else do you want me to apologize for because lately I'm taking all the hits!"

"Taking all the hits..." Tony repeated, tensing as Peter stood but not moving. He was too tired. Instead he looked up in disbelief and hissed, "You really believe that?"

Peter winced. Tony had just done the one thing that he never wanted to go through again. Peter knew he had nightmares, knew he couldn't sleep, knew he didn't like the water that much. He had taken it for Peter, even though everything in his body screamed no. Peter knew that, but he had to pretend he didn't.

"There you go again, making everything about you," Peter snarled. He needed Tony to stand up and turn around without him asking to. This was going to be harder than he thought. It had to look real. "Cause that's what you do, isn't it? You use people and when they're all said and done you kick them to the curb."

"You really like the sound of your own voice. Have you officially convinced yourself that's how it happened?" Tony demanded. Peter could tell he was trying to get him to calm down and not blow their cover by being overdramatic, but Peter had one thing to ask and one thing only and he needed to build up to it. He was gonna snap, and make this work, because he needed to know.

"How I convinced myself?" Peter spluttered, yelling, "Right, because it's never your fault, you're a saint!"

"Go sit down, I don't want to hear this," Tony muttered and there was some truth in his gaze. He was shocked by the outburst, exhausted and confused, Peter could tell.

"Sorry Tony, you can't tell me what to do anymore," Peter snarled.

"You're still a kid," Tony snapped, his gaze flashing.

Peter smirked, "Yeah, but I'm not your kid." Tony looked up in pure hurt and fury. He kept his mouth shut and shook his head. Peter added the next line, "And I never was."

"If you want to pull out the big guns, we'll pull out the big guns," Tony swore angrily, getting to his feet. He staggered a bit, uneasy and off balanced, still holding his shoulder but Peter couldn't help but look at his expression. It was pain, it was absolute torture, it was shock, and he hated himself for ever being the reason Tony made that face. He had crossed the line earlier, so Tony was constantly scanning his gaze for some indication that he was lying but Peter would give him no such thing. Tony demanded quietly, maintaining his calm through gritted teeth, "Is that how you want this to go?"

"Yes, it is. You ruined my life!" Peter shouted.

Tony nodded and spread his hand, the other still cradled against his chest and he sneered, "Nice kid, let me have it, go for it."

"Oh, shut up," Peter swore.

Tony waited patiently, before sneering with hate, "You done yet Pete?"

"You don't get to call me Pete!" Peter yelled furiously.

That crossed the line. He saw the hurt in Tony's eyes, and he knew he couldn't take much more, and he still needed to get him to turn or he would lose his opportunity. In a fit of rage, Peter's chest heated up and he paced to the side, making Tony turn and face him. The minute he was parallel to him Peter stopped and met his eyes. Anger clashed and roared as they both stared each other down.

Peter broke the deafening silence as a tidal wave and screamed, "I just got beaten to a pulp for an hour and freaking half! That was because of you! While you had water splashed on your face."

Tony's gaze darkened and he sneers, "Fine, next time you take the waterboarding and I'll take the small beating. If you think it was water getting flicked in my face Peter, by all means, dive in. This just goes to prove that you don't care about anyone but yourself!"

"Right back at you!" Peter yelled. In one fluid motion, he picked up the bucket that had been left on the ground and threw it at Tony's head. Out of instinct, like he knew he would, Tony ducked and it missed him, just barely though. There was a loud clang as it slammed into the wall behind him and Tony gasped in shock, but Peter wasn't paying attention to him; he was listening. A millisecond later Peter heard the small shatter and in an instant he surged forward and grabbed Tony's collar, shoving him against the wall as hard as he possibly could, putting most of the emphasis on his bad shoulder.

Tony screamed, gasping in pain and for a second, fear shone in his eyes, as if he was afraid of him. He staggered against the wall to the point where Peter was literally holding him up while he got his legs locked again. But he flinched in Peter's grasp.

Desperate to clear things up, and never wanting Tony to look at him in terror like he just did, Peter hissed, "I just popped your shoulder back, you're welcome." He watched Tony flex it as much as he could under his tough grip, still wary and unsure.

"What the hell is wrong with you-" Tony demanded, struggling in Peter's grip as he pinned him fiercely.

"Listen to me, Tony, listen to me! There's only one camera in here and it's in the wall," Peter spoke quickly. "The audio was in the corner. The camera is still functional but the mic is off- I just shattered it. We have roughly eighty seconds until they come in here and break us apart."

"How do you know that?" Tony asked, his eyes narrowing.

"I spent a week in here, Tony, and have had some free time," Peter snarled. "I'm also observant. You done asking idiotic questions? We have seventy seconds now."

"Yeah, I- I guess I'm done," he said weakly before asking, "What are you doing, kid?"

"I just have one question. Just one," Peter said firmly.

"Ask," Tony said.

"First punch me," Peter demanded.

"What?" Tony spluttered, his eyes widening with confusion. He winced as Peter put pressure on his arm.

"Look, we've got to make this look real so how about you listen to me and punch me in the face," Peter snarled.

Tony shook his head, "No, kid-

"Fine," Peter snarled and without hesitation he punched Tony hard across the jaw. The man's head snapped to the side and he brought it back in shock.

"Peter, what the-"

"Well one of us needed to do it. Now answer this, right now. Why the hell did you come looking for me? You're Iron Man Tony, you're a genius. And you go in without backup, alone, knowing they'd be there to get you," he said quickly, before he lowered his voice. "Why did you do it?"

"Peter-" Tony said slowly, still reeling from the hit, pushing back against Peter's arm but he wouldn't let up.

Peter gripped his collar in his fist and shoved him hard against the wall again so much that Tony winced. Peter's eyes flashed and he snarled, "Answer me."

"Because your life was on the line and I had just lost the one person I had wanted to protect," Tony hissed finally, not meeting Peter's gaze.

Peter was breathing hard and tears pricked at his eyes. Peter also lowered his head and spluttered in disbelief, "But you knew - you had to have thought they would have-"

"I didn't care," Tony admitted, cutting him off. He gave a weak smile but it would have been right there if a camera wasn't pointed at him. "When it's about you, kid, everything goes out the window. I knew someone would be there and I really didn't give a crap what happened to me as long as I knew you were still alive. I'm reckless when you're in trouble, kid. That's always been the bottom line."

"Right, because we're weaker," Peter remembered, letting out a sad laugh as he loosened his grip in a moment of vulnerability.

"I didn't say that," Tony whispered back and for a second it looked like he actually meant it. How was this the same man who sent the voice mail to him? He didn't know.

Peter clenched his jaw before he clenched his fist harder around Tony's collar, emotions crashing around his head. He bit his lip and swallowed before he heard footsteps. "Okay," he rasped, a sob caught in his throat and said through gritted teeth, "Are you okay?"

Tony scoffed and made a face, "Yeah, I'm great." Then he intensified his gaze and looked at Peter, "You?"

Peter nodded before his spine tingled. People were coming. He cleared his throat and gritted his teeth, "You shouldn't have taken the waterboarding for me."

Tony didn't even hesitate, his gaze firm, "I had to."

Peter lowered his gaze and snuck a subtle glance at the door with wide eyes, "Okay, they're almost here. Now hit me."

Tony frowned in confusion and shock, "W-what?"

"You need to hit me this time," Peter insisted. "Damian knows you won't take this crap when he sees the tape."

"I said no, Peter. I'm not hitting you," Tony said almost immediately, stubbornly refusing.

Peter punched him again, Tony's head smacking against the wall with a loud curse, shoving him backward. Peter loosened his grip and a small smile formed on his lips. "You want to hit me now?"

"A little yeah," Tony admitted, wiping blood off of his lip and glaring at him, but there was no hate behind it.

"Make it convincing," Peter gave him a smirk as the door opened.

Tony swung, landing a soft hit that did its job on the jaw of the teen. Peter fell with a quick wince and Tony felt his heart squeezed by a cold fist. Someone tackled Peter and the cry of pain that came from the kid killed him inside.

He was thrown to the opposite wall, his hands retied as he was pressed against the floor, his arm mercilessly yanked behind his back. Peter was getting the same treatment on the other side of the room, and when their gazes locked, they spoke a thousand words. Slowly, a stitch was added to the wound between them. It wasn't much, but it was a start. And it was a solid foundation.

Steve was swirling his cup of coffee at the counter. It was about 3 am and he couldn't sleep so he went down to the kitchen. Sipping the warm drink he sighed and put his head in his hands, rubbing his temples.

Suddenly his phone rang and he blinked, looking at it. He answered it and quickly put it to his ear, "Ned?"

"Hi, sorry, I know it's late-"

"Is something wrong?" Steve demanded urgently, his knuckles gripping the table as he slowly rose out of his seat in panic.

"No, no, I just...I needed to- I can go-" Ned trailed off.

Steve shook his head with a sigh of relief, sinking back into his seat and drinking some coffee. He let out a small laugh and shook his head, rubbing his eyes. "No, kid, it's okay. I just thought someone had gotten to you or something."

"No, nothing like that. Just- hang on, why are you up?" Ned asked curiously.

Steve chuckled and took another gulp of coffee, forming his hands around the hot cup, "Same reason as you, I think."

Ned stay silent before he asked, *"Are you any closer to...to finding them?"*

"Closer, yes. Close?" Steve hesitated before he decided not to lie to the kid. "No. These guys are smart. But we will find them. I promise." He swirled his cup and then asked gently, "You want to tell me why you called?"

"There's just this kid in school named Flash, he picked on Peter and I a lot. He asked me today where Peter was and I said he was sick. He said Peter was faking it and I just- I walked away wondering what would have happened if I told him the truth. That Peter was kidnapped and probably being tortured right now and it just got me thinking about- I just- I can't sleep knowing he's probably tied up somewhere, beaten to a pulp-"

"Hey, hey, woah," Steve stopped him immediately. "Don't think about that."

"No offense, Mr. Rogers, but when I know what I know and don't see my best friend next to me taking a chem test, that's the first thing I think of," Ned said fiercely.

Steve sighed and nodded weakly, "Yeah, I know. I guess I'm a hypocrite. Tony and I...we don't always see eye to eye, but we're like family. I'd die for him in a second, and I just wish I could have done more. But listen kid, thinking about what's happening isn't going to help them, or bring them back, or make you feel better."

"Yeah, it definitely doesn't," Ned said quietly. *"Just- I know I'm supposed to stay out of this, and I am, but if you find anything-"*

"I'll let you know," Steve promised, admiring the kid's loyalty to his friend and his good heart. "You know Peter's lucky to have you as his best friend."

"Yeah, I just wish I could have known sooner," Ned admitted. *"I should have known something was wrong- I did know! I just didn't act on it."*

Steve nodded, "I didn't help Tony as much as I should have in this whole situation, and I wish every day that I had done more. You know, kid, we're both on different sides of this argument, but they're starting to sound the same. Tony never stopped caring for Peter. He was a wreck without him."

"I just wish they got that," Ned said softly. *"They're too caught up in their anger to step back and just...they're stubborn sometimes."*

"Sometimes is an understatement," Steve repeats with a laugh.

Ned chuckled before he sobered his tone. *"You know he was mad at you too though,"* Ned said, a twinge of annoyance in his voice from protectiveness over his best friend. *"So when we get him back, don't push him away again."*

Steve lowered his head and pushed his coffee aside, suddenly not in the mood for it, "I know. It was a mistake. I see that now." He just saw it too late. "Get some sleep, kid. Don't worry about Peter or Tony. They're gonna be fine."

"Yeah...okay. Thanks. I'll...bye."

Steve hung up and tossed the phone to the table. He ran his hands through his hair and let out a small curse under his breath.

I STILL HAVENT HAD COFFEE BUT WE THRIVIN. Hello. I'm back. you're done reading! I want to steal Cap's coffee so you know what imma doing the minute I finish writing this. Yeet! How was it? Lmk, I love hearing from you guys- all of your comments have made writing this such a blast and I cannot thank you enough <3 As for next chapter....teehee, well this....this is where crap hits the fan. If any of you know me, you know how kidnap fics go, so for those who dont....strap in for a rough ride because oof. Pain angst you name it we've got it. Andddddddd some BIG BIG things coming up that put a wrench in a lot AND provide some ironclad and protectiveness which is always a fav. So we've hit a turning point, and I am so excited to continue writing. Hopefully hopefully hopefully new chapter in normal time :) Thank you guys so so much for reading and stay tuned!! I love you all 3000 <3

...But Can I Let You Take One

Chapter Notes

Heyoooo lovely readerssssss <3 Thank you guys for all your awesome comments and support, it's constantly making my day and I am having such a blast writing this!!!! This one was an absolute blast to write haha so I really hope you like it. It gets a little intense, but then we catch up with some people, and fix some things that were broken. So we're on the mend! It's a super nice day today so I'm HYPED andddddddd yeah! Have an awesome weekend, enjoy the chapter, and I hope you all are doing well and staying safe and healthy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"He took out the audio mic we planted," Richard said slowly, playing back the tape again.

"Yeah but he wasn't even looking at it," Damian pointed as Peter flung the buckey right into the screen. He replayed it once and squinted, shaking his head. "That was pure rage- he barely missed Tony's head. It's a good thing Stark has reflexes." Richard scoffed in agreement and Damian rubbed his chin, letting the video keep playing as Peter slammed Tony into the wall. "And even if he had done it on purpose, it was probably so I wouldn't hear what he was saying. Look, he punches him twice, and not softly I might add."

Richard zooms in as Peter slams his knuckles into Tony's jaw, "It is convincing."

"Because I think it's real. Even if he took out the mic on purpose, the kid was probably laying into Tony about how this all started. He just didn't want me to know cause that could be something else I could use against them..." Damian shook his head, "But that's a huge if. We're stretching. I doubt he did it on purpose. I mean, Tony even got a hit in before the guards got them apart."

"You're still confident they're telling the truth?" Richard asked slowly, turning in the chair.

Damian shrugged, "I don't know anymore. To be perfectly honest, I don't care. All I know is I have Tony Stark and Peter Parker, two of the most brilliant minds to ever exist with unlimited capabilities. They have information, and pain tells all."

Richard makes a face, "Tony didn't give you anything during your last session."

Damian glares at him, "I was testing out the water. I nearly killed him."

"That's another thing. You sure there's not something there? Peter saved his life."

Damian shrugged, "The kid is 16. He's not heartless."

Richard shrugged, "True."

"As of right now, we're invisible, and I can do whatever I want to them. I'll jab at the right spots and it doesn't matter what kind I get, but I'll get a reaction. And if I expose their little scheme, that's just something helpful," Damian shrugs. "If I don't, then I don't have a problem with that...they'll talk one way or another."

Richard nodded, "Good plan sir. Would you like me to call the-"

"No," Damian snapped, shaking his head. "Not yet. We'll give that another day. Tony took the hit last time, so I think I'll go with Peter today, but make Tony watch. A mix of everything. And do me a favor, leave the microphone out and remove the camera. Let them see it done too."

"Might I ask...why?" Richard asked slowly, confused at the reasoning.

"Because if they get soft knowing we're not watching them, I'm more likely to uncover the ugly truth. Their guard will be down. They'll give each other pep talks sure, but they'll also start to fix themselves- build back whatever they lost, which will make breaking it down all the more fun. And if they are telling the truth and do despise each other, then it's useless. Just constant arguing and insults," Damian rolled his eyes before he frowned and sighed in annoyance. "And I really don't feel like watching hours of that kind of footage."

"You don't watch it sir, I do," Richard pointed out.

Damian shot him a look before standing and patting him harshly on the shoulder, "So I guess I made your life easier. Do it. I'm gonna go have a chat with the boys."

Peter twisted his hands in the cuffs and winced in pain, sitting up more against the wall, his back sore from the hard floor. Some of his cuts had healed, but some were still dripping blood. It wasn't as cold and since he was no longer in the chair he didn't have the cold water dripping down his back. Instead he and Tony were just slumped on either sides of the room, not talking. They made hesitant eye contact once in a while, but kept their mouths shut to the point where the silence was deafening. The cuffs bit mercilessly into his palms and Peter grit his teeth, the sharp tingle of pain traveling up his spine.

About a minute later, Peter felt the hair on his arms raise and his head snapped to the side, listening. A shiver ran down his back and he glared at Tony harshly, a warning, just as the door opened. They both sat up and then looked away from their visitor.

"Well you two can't seem to leave each other alone, huh?" Damian said, rubbing his hands as he stepped in. "Nice shiner Tony."

Tony faked a smile, "Thank the idiot across from me."

"You two went at it," Damian snorted, standing in between them and crossing his arms. "Even I was impressed."

"What can I say?" Peter smiled. "Opportunity arose, so I shot my shot."

"I admire that," Damian nods.

Peter pouts his lower lip, "Aw. You're gonna make me cry. Seriously, don't compliment me. It makes me uncomfortable."

Damian snickers, "Do you ever think you're gonna run out of one liners?"

"Well you somehow haven't run out of brain cells, so I guess miracles do happen," Tony smiled sarcastically.

"Between the two of you, I might go insane," Damian announced.

"Don't worry. You already have," Peter gives him a smile.

Damian looks down and grins, before walking over to him. Peter presses his back against the wall and pushes back his shoulders, keeping his chin up to show he wasn't afraid, even though his heartbeat was getting faster as Damian stepped closer. He steels his gaze and glares at the man who stops at his side. Peter doesn't say anything as Damian just stays where he is, looking down at him with narrowed eyes.

"For the love of God, I feel like I'm in a Hallmark movie. Get a room," Tony calls with a scoff, but his eyes are fully trained on the man who is standing a little too close for his liking. Before he can even blink, Damian's hand curls around Peter's collar and yanks him roughly to his feet, slamming the kid against the wall.

Tony tenses and Peter can tell he's debating getting to his feet. Peter rolls his eyes to show he's ok and laughs through a wince as his hands are pinned behind him, "Well even if I did swing that way and have a thing for older guys, at least take me to dinner first-" Damian swings and hits him across the face. Peter brings his chin back with a bleeding lip, blood in his mouth. He cocks his head and leans forward despite Damian's hand gripping his collar. "Oh, wow. Did that make you feel strong, Dames?"

"I'm gonna enjoy this," Damian snarls, a literal glint in his unhinged gaze as he pushes him to walk. Tony scrambles to his feet before they can get to the door.

"Hey! What am I supposed to do, read a magazine?" Tony demands fiercely, and Peter can hear the fear in his voice, unsure if Damian can. His feet struggle to stand himself up since he's being held in such a painful way, the grip on his scalp already giving him a headache.

"Of course not," Damian smiles as someone else enters the room. "You're gonna watch."

He drags Peter through the door and he hears Tony throwing curses behind him as he's manhandled to follow them down the hall. Peter's tossed to the floor in the center of another room and he scrapes his arms as he tumbles to a stop. Groaning he pushes himself up and looks around, getting his bearings. Moving to the far end of the wall as Damian walks over to a table, he snorts and says, "I *knew* it! I knew you had a dungeon."

"I didn't doubt it for a second. You have fun down here Damian?" Tony's pushed into the room as well, held near the corner by a guy twice his size. He glances at Peter warily, and they exchange a couple words through their gazes. Then Tony breaks the eye contact and looks over at the man who was being a literal psychopath as he examined the instruments on the table.

Damian finally decides on one that looks like a stick and saunters over with a sigh, glancing at Peter with almost pity, "Look, you're young. I don't w-"

"If you say you 'don't want to do this' I will shove that thing right up your ass," Peter growls, getting to his feet near the corner and putting himself in a very defensive stance.

"Fine," Damian puts up his hands and holds out the instrument. "Do you know what this is?"

Peter narrows his eyes and nods, "Yeah, it's the stick. I didn't know they removed it from your-" Damian drives his fist forward, sinking it hard into his stomach. Peter coughs, seeing Tony flinch over his shoulder. Peter steels himself and runs his arm hard into Damian's side, forcing him back in a moment of defiance. Then he smiles and says, "Oh, no, there's another one still stuck in there."

Damian smiles before he admires the stick he's holding. "It's mostly used for cattle. It produces a

high voltage, low current electric shock. It's not meant for humans, but one shock won't kill you, it will just hurt," he assures him.

Peter smirks, nodding, "I see. Oh, but you don't have will power. One won't be enough. Like Oreos."

Damian drives it forward without warning and jabs it into Peter's side. He had been trying to picture how much it would hurt, but he hadn't even come close. The pain spread instantly, like fire on hot coals. Peter tries to scream, his eyes widening in pain as his entire body went rigid, but even the muscles in his throat locked from the current. He let his heels tip him backward so he could fall against the wall to get away, managing to stay on his feet as Damian pulled it away from his side. It couldn't have been more than two seconds, but he was still shaking, blinking white spots away as he forced his lungs to work as he leaned against the wall, doubled over.

"How did that feel, Pete? Not what you were expecting?"

"Don't call me that," Peter snarls, straightening again and managing to take another deep breath.

"Enough of those and I could do some real damage. Lucky for me, you recover quickly," Damian notices. "So I hope this takes a while. Why don't I start? We'll go small."

"You'd know all about small, right?" Peter groaned.

Damian somehow ignored him and asked calmly, "How many Iron Man suit models are there?"

"Don't get all pissy, size doesn't matter," Peter stalls, and Tony can tell he's a little nervous, even if he wouldn't admit it.

"How many, Peter?" Damian asks, losing his patience.

Peter's gaze flicks over to Tony who immediately gives him a subtle nod. Peter saw pure horror on Tony's face, knowing what was about to happen. The demand was simple: tell him. After what Peter had just went through, Tony didn't want to have it happen again, especially over a question like that. Peter should probably answer it, because it would do no actual damage if Damian knew it. But Peter's pride would be wounded if he gave him what he wanted on the first question.

So instead of listening to Tony's quiet plea, he makes a face and drawls, "Isn't that on Google or something?"

Damian laughs, before jamming the prod forward. Peter grits his teeth as he feels the shock. The edge burns into his skin as Peter's legs give out which actually helps because Damian doesn't move down with him. The current stops as he hits the ground, shaking as he gasps for breath. "Okay! Okay!" he gulps after Damian pulls it away. "69. There are 69."

Damian straightens and smiles, "See that wasn't so hard-" But Peter's already grinning, a laugh bubbling up in his throat, so contagious that even the man holding Tony snickers as he realizes Peter's joke. There's a blatant lightbulb moment Damian gets it and Peter kills his smile. "Okay, sorry, that was- unprofessional. It's actually 420-"

"You little-" Damian slams his heel into Peter's stomach and he doubles over in pain before feeling the shock at his shoulder this time, and this time it doesn't stop.

"Sick bastard-" Tony swears from behind in utter helplessness, and Peter can hear his muffled struggling but then his ears start to ring.

A scream tears itself from Peter's closed throat as he arches his back, trying to get away from the agony. He's trapped in his own body, unable to move except for his shaking, his legs kicking on their own accord. He feels tears come to his eyes as his limbs clench and strain. His cut on his cheek splits from his scream, the pain like fire coursing through his veins, the stick scalding his skin. Damian finally pulls it away and steps back, Peter gasping for breath on the ground, still writhing as the last few shocks die down in his body. His teeth are chattering, his hands shaking and he stutters weakly, "W-well, that was fantastic, t-thank you-"

Through his blurry vision he can see Tony's now sporting a split lip from struggling too much, muttering curses under his breath, his eyes glued to Peter, fire raging in his pupils.

"Humans aren't supposed to take more than three of these shocks," Damian says slowly, before a sick grin appears on his face. "I think we should test that theory."

"For the love of God, I can't take this idiocy anymore. There's 49 of them!" Tony shouts, being held back by the man who's got a grip on his shoulder and arm. "You happy now? What good does that do you? Knowing how many suits I made? Half of them don't even work!"

"I don't know Tony, if it was so simple, why didn't he answer the question?" Damian asks innocently over his shoulder.

"Because he's an idiot," Tony snarls at Peter. "You're gonna get yourself killed."

"S-screw you," Peter spits.

Damian crouches by Peter's side and turns his chin back to him, "Look at me, not him. I'm gonna keep using this if you don't answer my questions. Now I've got another one for you, and I suggest you think carefully about your answer, take your time."

"Y-you proctoring the SAT or s-something?" Peter mutters, jerking out of the man's grasp, his eyes screwed up with pain as he remains where he is, shaking on the ground.

"What operating system does the main lab use?" Damian asks calmly.

Peter scoffs, licking his lips and trying to get the smell of burning flesh out of his nose. He maintains control of his voice and swallows, "Well that one I can answer because it's not any one that you know. Tony built it from scratch, so good luck trying to hack something that doesn't have a manual."

Damian shrugs, "Fair enough. How about security? Tell me everything you know about the compound's security. Where cameras are, what generators power them, where the control room is-"

"Why don't I draw you a picture while I'm at it?" Peter snarled. "You think I know that kinda stuff? I'm flattered you think I'm a genius."

Damian rubs his chin, "Fair. That's a little specific. What about the fail safe password? When there's an alert, there's a shut down code that disables it so that the compound doesn't go on lockdown."

Peter grins, "Did you go on a field trip to Stark Industries or something?"

"There was a five year old throwing a temper tantrum in the lobby two weeks ago," Tony called. "Was that you, bud?"

"Do you know the code Peter?" Damian asks simply.

"Yes," Peter responds, which was true. He did. Damian seems shocked by his answer and Peter laughs, "I never lie to you, Dames. I just withhold valuable information. There's a difference."

"Not in my book," Damian smiles fakely.

Peter widens his eyes and whispers, "You read? That's a little advanced for you, don't you think?"

"He reads the Level 1 chapter books," Tony supplies helpfully, still trying to get the man's attention off the kid. "The ones with a lot of pictures."

"Funny," Damian hisses, looking like he wanted to slap them both. "What's the code, Peter?"

"800-588-2300," Peter says quietly and Damian turns towards one of the men by the door, signaling them to write it down. A smirk grows on Peter's face and he quietly sings, "Empire, today."

The man turns around in anger and grips the stick, taking a deep breath in an attempt to retain his composure. "Hilarious, Peter. One last chance," Damian warns through his teeth.

Peter grins; now he's just having fun. He looks up with big wide eyes and whispers, "877, 241-"

The shock is right in the center of his chest and Peter clamps his mouth shut, jerking on his cuffs as his body trembles. It's dug in harder and Peter can literally feel his rib cage cracking, muscles being stretched and pulled, still unable to break away. His teeth clench and he bites his cheek so hard he draws blood. A white pain erupts in his head, and with a caving chest, Peter can't hold it back any longer- he lets out a scream of pain that rips through his throat and fills the room. His body continues to flinch and thrash on it's own accord from the current and he hears someone yelling- besides himself. A second later it stops and the muffled sound turns out to be Tony's screams.

Peter's vision is blurry but he sees Damian is not looking at him anymore and Peter breathes a sigh of relief before realizing he's arguing with Tony who probably made him stop in the first place. He collapses to the ground, his body twitching as voices sound underwater and barely audible to him and his fuzzy vision.

"-what's wrong with this Tony? I thought you didn't care about him?"

"I don't," Tony seethed and Peter winced at that, looking away.

"Then what's the problem?" Damian asked innocently.

"I may hate him but I am not going to let you kill a sixteen year old kid! I don't give a crap about him getting a little scratched because of me- we've been down that road, but when a frickin sophomore stops breathing, I have a problem with that you sick son of a-"

Damian waves him off and turns back to Peter who was squirming on the floor, shuddering as the effects of the prod die down again. He coughs, sucking in air that feels like it's scorching hot, the spots where the prod had been thrust against him burned and red, still steaming. Peter cries out at the slightest movement as his legs flail on the ground, his cuffs scraping against the stone in an attempt to put some form of distance between him and his torturer.

"Anything to say Peter? That was more than three, so I'm proud of you," Damian admits.

"Yeah, because I definitely give a crap about what you think," Peter coughs out, twisting in pain on the ground, still trying to breath correctly as he convulses in habit, his muscles still locked.

"Code yet? Or do we need another round?" Damian asks.

"You're gonna kill him!" Tony yells in complete and utter panic.

"Not if he gives me the code," Damian points out.

"18-" Peter gasps out, "77. Kars4Kids."

"Jesus," Damian hisses in fury.

"Donate your car today," Peter manages a weak smile, exhausted from the pain, barely able to lift his head. He starts to fall back down but Damian slips the stick, turned off this time, under his chin, raising him up. Peter tenses and holds his breath, his adam's apple bobbing as he feels the stick that causes so much pain dug under his jaw. He and Damian lock glares and then Peter braces.

"I dare you," he whispers. The man was gonna do it anyway, so mine as well get a quip in there before hand.

Sure enough, Damian clicks it on just for a second and Peter whimpers as his body jolts, his eyes flying open. The stick is pressed hard under his jaw which is now stinging and Peter feels tears come to his eyes. He manages a glance toward Tony who looks almost worse than him, conflicted and in pain from witnessing what he just did. Peter's gaze suddenly snaps back at another small jolt, his eyesight flashing a bright white in pain. He lets out a muffled cry, his jaw locking, muscles spazing. His feet kick and Peter grits his chattering teeth, trying to steady his shaking breathing.

"Are we having fun yet, Peter?" Damian asks quietly.

"Well I haven't run out-" Peter gulps, "of famous jingles, so yeah, I'd say I'm having a grand old time."

"I think we need to spice it up. You know what happens with electricity and water, right?" Damian asks, letting Peter's chin fall. He goes slumping to the ground with a small groan and stays there, flinching, his cheek pressed against the cold floor.

"Damian, I swear to God," Tony growls. He makes eye contact with Peter and all of his senses spiral back, suddenly having energy, but not for the best reasons. Tony wants to do it, he wants to take his place, or admit he cares about him, or just say it to lie- he wants to do something. Knowing that would ruin everything and make their life even more of hell, Peter shuts him down immediately with a furious a look that says, *no*. He could do this. He could take this.

He tries to move his locked legs up to his chest and roll over as he makes out with tremendous effort, "Yeah, I went to normal school not psychopath academy. We learned the alphabet: ABCD-FU. And about water and electricity. Fun experiment for you to try, Damian. Nice hot bath. Add a toaster. Just stick it right in there."

"Mature," Damian admits, pulling out a bucket.

Peter groans in pain, his voice cracking, "Well I am only 16."

Damian looks over at Tony and grins, pointing at the full bucket, wide enough and deep enough to stick someone's head in, "Bring back fun memories?" Tony blanches, jerking in his captor's hold. Damian laughs and shrugs, "I just thought Peter would like to have a taste of what you went

through, since he missed it the first time."

"No-" Tony starts but Peter glares at him. He knits his eyebrows.

Promise me you won't stop him.

Tony shifts his position and swallows, cocking his head and gritting his teeth. Peter increases the anger and seriousness in his glare.

Promise me.

Tony falls back in his heels and his expression shatters.

All of that happened in less than a second.

Peter tears his gaze away as he's pulled over by his arm, yelping in pain when he can't stand fully on shaky legs. He's shoved forward and his ribs hit the ground, a hand curling in his hair, getting a grip on his head. Peter feels himself be yanked up into a sitting position, Damian behind him.

The man is at his ear a second later and Peter snarls in distaste. "We'll move on. I need the location for the next international conference."

"Oh yeah, I know that. But do you need it or do you want it?" Peter slurs happily. The grip on his curls tighten and his head is yanked back so that he's staring at the ceiling. Without warning, a full bucket of water is dumped on him. Damian won't loosen his grip, Peter choking and spluttering as water trickles into his mouth and nose. He coughs up water, spitting it out of his mouth.

"Ask nicely," he rasps in desperation.

"What the hell," Damian decides to give it a shot. "Please," he insists harshly.

Peter gives him a wide grin. "Nah," he chokes out. His shirt gets soaked and Peter thrashes, his eyes stinging. Then the grip is released and Peter barely has time to suck in a breath before his chest closes up. The cattle prod is shoved hard into his side and Peter somehow finds enough strength to scream, his yell ripping through his throat.

"Ulysses Klaue. Name ring a bell?" Natasha asked, spinning around to face the team who was scattered across the lab.

Steve's brow furrowed and he looked up from the computer, "Yeah, yeah, that was the guy with Ultron. Black market arms dealer with vibranium."

"Black market...how do we have contacts from the black market?" Bucky asked slowly.

"Rhodey, you're busted," Clint jokes.

Bruce smiles slightly, shaking his head, "Tony kept them on his radar. He didn't sell them anything, but he stopped most of the major movements and went to a few conventions to make sure things weren't getting too dangerous."

Natasha nodded, "Klaue is an old friend. He's got the most connections out of anyone we know. And he's...oh my God, he's in the states doing a trade. Forty five minutes by jet, we could intercept it and see if he knows anything."

"Why is it such a big deal if he's in the states?" Rhodey asked.

"He operates off the African coast," Wanda explained quickly.

"Why don't we just call the guy?" Sam asked with a shrug, "If you've worked with him before."

"I wouldn't say worked with him," Clint scoffs, before he turned to Wanda with a grin. "Hey, that was the day I zapped you." Wanda frowns and everyone glares at Clint who gives her a smile, "Sorry. No hard feelings."

"Moving on," Bruce said, shooting Wanda a supportive look which she took with a nod.

"Also he doesn't exactly trust us since the last time we got involved he lost an arm," Natasha pointed out.

"I don't care if he trusts us. Honest opinion, when we get to him, do you think he would have any info?" Steve asked seriously.

Silence.

Rhodey speaks up, "Look, I don't know this guy aside from a folder we have on very dangerous people. But if he's messed with you guys, and come out on top, that's quite a reputation. If anyone is gonna know anything, it's probably him. It's a lead, we'd be stupid not to take it."

Steve nodded in agreement and gets to his feet, "Alright. Wanda, Nat, Clint, with me. Rhodey, I need you to come but stay on surveillance." Rhodey nodded. Steve looked around, "The rest of you, keep at it. We're narrowing down on the footage. And Bruce, do what you can with Vision to still try and pinpoint their access point. We'll be back in a bit."

"Is this really a good idea? Crashing a black market arms deal?" Wanda said to Steve as they walked down the hall to the loading ramp.

"If it means getting a location for Tony and Peter? Yeah," Steve nodded. "It's a good idea."

"This was not a good idea," Nat grumbled as they approached the abandoned warehouse. She put a hand to her ear, "Rhodey, talk to us."

"You got 15 guards on the perimeter, and a system which I can bypass when you get close enough. Once you get inside you need to give me access to their main frame, then I'll have the lights and doors at my hands."

"It's pretty sophisticated for a crappy building," Clint mutters as they crouch down near the trees, a truck driving down with a tarped back. It enters the building through the garage.

"They're not checking the backs," Natasha noticed. "I'll go in through one of those storage trucks and get Rhodey access to the server."

Steve nodded. "Once we get in, Wanda, get Clint up to a corner, high ground. Stay there, be our eyes, pick them off. Then Wanda comes with me and we confront Klaue after regrouping with Natasha."

"Fool proof plan," Rhodey says helpfully through their comm link. *"Natasha, approaching truck."*

Natasha winks, "Got it. See you in there guys." She waits for it to pass before she vaults over the

side of the road, sprinting and lunging for the back of the truck. Climbing on she rolls inside and a second later two men fall out unconscious, before a third some ways down the road, his uniform stripped off.

"Wanda," Steve says and she covers their trail, flicking her fingers. The men roll into ditches on either side of the road, invisible to a driver. Steve grips his shield and motions them forward. "Clint, top deck? Work your way down. Wanda follow him. I've got main level. Regroup at entrance."

They nod and Steve moves forward along the tree line, sprinting across the road. He flings his shield and it takes out the security camera.

"Dude I already looped the feed," Rhodey snickered.

Steve sighs as he clips his shield back in, "Thanks for telling me that."

"No problem. Nice throw though," Rhodey laughs.

Steve smirks, "Shut up." He approaches and hears footsteps down the hall. Steve waits till they turn the corner before he slams his shield back and flips over, kicking one guy in the back before he slams the other into the ground over his shoulder. Kicking the shield into his head for good measure Steve pulls them off to the side and runs down the side, crouching when he gets close to a guard. Steve lunges before he can turn around and puts him in a headlock. The man kicks and struggles but eventually slumps unconscious and Steve pushes him into nearby bushes. He lets his shield fly and takes out the last guy on the ground level before looking up.

Wanda lands beside him with her hand extended. Clint is by her side a second later and they all nod.

"How many'd you get?" Clint grins.

"Four," Steve said.

Clint snickers, "Amateur."

"How many did you get then?" Steve demands.

"Five," Clint sniffs in triumph.

"Well I beat both of you, with six," Wanda drawled. "Can we go now?"

They get to the door which starts to already open before Steve can put a hand to his ear and signal Rhodey. They tense, ready for a fight, but it's just Natasha, holding a key card with an innocent look. "Bout time. What took you so long?"

They get in and Steve nods at Wanda who takes off with Clint. Natasha and Steve walk forward, down the steps. "So you're just gonna walk right up to him and ask nicely?"

Steve nods slowly. "Yeah, that's the plan. Can you get in behind him?"

"Yeah, you want me to make a move?" She asked.

Steve shook his head, "Just wait for my signal."

Natasha nodded and pointed for him to go down the descending ramp. "Go down that hallway," she points, "and you'll get to the main room. He's on the right side. I'll come in through a door

directly behind him."

Steve nods and she goes a different direction. Wanda lands next to him and they jog down the ramp. "We're probably gonna get shot at when we get in there."

Wanda grins, "I can fix that."

They make their way down the hallway and hear voices. Steve knocks out the guard by the door and he falls with a loud thump. The voices quiet down and Steve sighs, not bothering to ask Rhodey to open the door. He kicks it off its hinges and it goes flying into the room, embedding itself in the far wall. Wanda closes her hand and every single gun in the room is ripped from its owners hands and flung against the wall.

Steve puts his shield back in place and steps through. There are a bunch of shouts and gasps and Steve scans the room until he finds the man he's looking for. He looks a little older, same baggy eyes and dirt covered skin, a shocked and angry expression plastered on his face that replaced a cocky smirk.

"Hey, we're here to buy," Steve smiled, before he cut his grin. "Look, I'm not here to cause any trouble," he announced loudly. "None of you are gonna be arrested because we already document every move you make. All of you are free to go, except you Klaue. We need to talk. And if any of you try anything, well...you won't like the outcome," Steve smiles.

No one moves. Or talks.

Steve sighs, "Or I can give the signal and we can arrest and kill you all. The rest of the Avengers are here, waiting and we've got every weapon available from SHIELD trained on every truck and every person. I'm prepared to let you all go. So walk out. While you still can. And before I lose my patience."

Still shocked silence.

"Preferably now," Steve snarls, reaching for his shield. Every door is slammed open by Wanda and people immediately file out, backing up in fear, leaving their guns behind.

Klaue sighs as even his group of men leaves him. Eventually they're alone and Wanda puts down her hand, every door closing but one, and the guns clattering to the ground around them. Silence. Deafening. Chilling. Dipped in tension.

"It's been a while Cap," Klaue states.

"I wish it was longer," Steve admits.

"You here for that candy?" he smirks at Wanda.

"Still afraid of cuttlefish?" she shoots back, before shaking her head. "We're here for Stark."

"Tony," Klaue says thoughtfully. "What does he want? My other arm? I already lost the first one because of him." He shakes his head, "Why should I help you? You're just gonna kill me after."

"If I was going to kill you, I would have had Natasha do it," Steve said, looking over his shoulder. "She's been behind you for about five minutes now."

"Hi Ulysses," Natasha says, leaning against the door with a wave. She pats him on the shoulder, walking past him as he turns around in shock. "And trust me, I really wanted to take the shot."

Klaue narrows his eyes and then spins, trying to run for the door but an arrow lands a foot in front of him, scratching his arm on its way down. Clint's on the next level, another arrow already notched and he calls, "I wouldn't do that if I were you. Guarantee ya this thing is faster."

Klaue finally sighs and walks over to grab a chair, sitting down in it and spreading his hands, "What do you want to know about Stark?"

"Where is he?" Steve demands.

"What do you mean where is he?" Klaue snickers. "How should I know?"

"Tony was taken, along with teen who's Spiderman," Natasha said firmly. "Do you know anything about that?"

"Someone actually...kidnapped Tony Stark?" Klaue gasps, hooting with laughter. "Well then they have got balls. Sorry mates, I don't know anything about that. If I did I would love to shake that man or woman's hand."

"You son of a-" Steve swears, starting forward but Natasha puts her hand out to stop him.

Klaue flinches, "Look, love or hate Tony, you've got to admit that's some serious feat. But I have nothing to do with this. If you think I have Tony, I would have been bragging about it to everyone, which would have probably gotten me killed. Whoever has him is smart and is keeping it quiet, so if I were- wait what was the other guy's name?"

"Spiderman," Natasha said.

Klaue rubs his chin, "Now there's a possible lead. Look, I only deal with arms dealers, as you know, but sometimes I double dip into the crime, drug selling, gang member groups- good for business. A convention the other day, someone said there were people out of jail who were going to get their chance to get back at the guy who put them there. A few friends of mine who got locked up."

"We know that," Steve interrupted. "Breakouts from the Raft. We know they're heading for Spiderman and we're already compiling a list of names. This is old news, stop stalling."

"Easier there Cap," Klaue hissed, spreading his hands. "You have names, I have connections. I know where your baddies are, and I'm friends with them. I can put a tracer on them and just sit back and watch. They'll lead you right to your boys."

"In exchange for what?" Wanda demanded. "There's always a price with you."

"Smart girl," Klaue winked. "I'm sorry about your brother-"

Wanda clenched her teeth and Clint let an arrow fly. It sliced his shoulder and Klaue hissed, staggering out of the chair and glaring at Hawkeye who shrugged and notched another arrow.

"How about you give us the locations," Natasha suggested. "Before we actually kill you, because it's starting to get tempting."

"Romanoff, now you can't kill me. I'm the only one with a lead on where your boys are," he smiled.

Steve's vision had been slowly going red. The fact that this man was dangling information in front of them, using himself as leverage, using Tony as leverage- that was enough. Natasha couldn't stop

him as he sprung forward and slammed Klaue into a wall, pressing his shield right into his shoulder and hissing in his ear, "I'm usually the civil one, but when you think it's okay to joke about my friend like that, I guess you see my dark side. You tell me the locations of those criminals, now, or I shove the edge of this through your arm and then work my way onto your other limbs, do you understand me?"

"Captain America ladies and-" Klaue hooted, calling his bluff. Steve's eyes narrowed and without a second thought he started pressing. Immediately, Klaue screamed in pain, struggling and yelling, "Okay! Stop!"

Steve stepped back, letting the man fall, clutching his arm and Klaue looked up furiously, "Get me a computer and a phone."

"I'm impressed Peter," Damian admits. "It's been twenty-two minutes, and you haven't let up. I would have thought I would have gotten something out of you by now."

Peter's shaking on the ground, coughing up water and flinching as the last bits of the previous shock rippled through his body. He was dripping wet, bucket after bucket dumped over him to worsen the shock, nearly killing him each time. A normal person would have been dead- unfortunately, Peter wasn't normal. His cuffs burned his skin and Peter had lost track of how many times the prod had been shoved ruthlessly at his side. He couldn't breathe- water in his nose and throat, probably some in his lungs too. His voice was hoarse from screaming, his head pounding. He choked out more water as he writhed on the ground, barely conscious, vision swimming.

Damian patted him on the knee and Peter whimpered, more in anger than fear, jerking away from his touch.

"Leave him alone Damian, I swear to God-" Tony swore.

Peter looked at him miserably. The past twenty or so minutes had been torture for both of them. But Peter refused to let Tony cave. He glared at him each time he could with a repeated message. *You promised.* Tony had cursed, thrown insults, even turned Damian's attention on him for a couple punches when he wouldn't shut up, but that was as far as Peter would let him go. Each time the man looked ready to break, Peter would scream a curse at him, tell him this was his fault and that he hated him, actually reminding Tony of their plan. It was better this way, he understood that, although Peter knew he would heal eventually. But Tony would never be able to get Peter's screams out of his head.

"Oh, we're nowhere near done, Tony," Damian grinned and Peter glared at him.

"What are you waiting for then?" Peter demanded weakly. Damian shoved the prod into his side and Peter didn't even scream. His consciousness was torn away and his head hit the ground as his body jolted from the shock, pain like fire spreading across his body. And it didn't stop. He didn't remember it ever ceasing because slowly everything turned to black. His eyes were open but he couldn't really see out of them. His lips were parted slightly in a silent scream. Tears trickled down his already wet cheeks, mixing with water. Bangs were plastered against his head with sweat. It was like he was on fire; he could smell his skin burning.

Damian went in with the prod again before there was suddenly a large commotion.

Tony, somehow free of his ropes, completely knocked out the man behind him with an elbow to the forehead before slamming his head into the wall. Tony pointed at Damian, his wrists dripping

with blood from untangling his bonds behind his back for the past fifteen minutes, "Back up."

Peter was well aware of the prod so close to his chest but he couldn't find it in himself to move, drifting in and out of consciousness.

"Come again?" Damian asked innocently.

"Look, I hate the kid, but this? This isn't just torture. You're gonna kill him. And I don't know, maybe I just have a moral compass and you don't, but I won't let that happen. He's a sophomore in highschool you sick, delusional, messed up, son of a--"

Damian shoved the cattle prod forward with a smile. Tony was the one to let out a yell as Peter flinched, his eyes welling with tears as his body shook on its own accord. Suddenly the prod was knocked away as Tony crossed the room in less than a second to shove Damian back.

"Stop," he repeated firmly. "He's had enough. He's barely breathing you lunatic! If you want to torture someone, torture me. I'm the one with all the info, and I've got plenty of sarcastic quips ready for you."

"You want to take his place?" Damian asked slowly.

"*Want to?*" Tony scoffed. "*Hell* no. Need to? Yes. You don't just kill sixteen year old kids because you can. So if you want to shove that thing somewhere, shove it up your ass. And if you want to get to the kid, you're gonna go through me."

Damian gripped the prod and nodded, "I can deal with that." He drove it forward and Tony sidestepped out of the way, trapping his arm to his side and punching him across the face, blood splattering across his knuckles as he breaks the man's nose. Damian twisted with a snarl, turning his hand and jabbing the prod into Tony's back. He let out a cry of pain, dropping to his knees and Damian flipped the prod around, slamming the butt of it into his head. Tony went down hard on his side, head hitting the floor. Damian readied the prod for him to get back up but the man didn't move.

Damian scoffed, muttering, "Weak." He turned to the teenager who was shaking on the ground, his eyes fluttering as he watched helplessly. "Where were we, Pete?"

Just as he passes Tony, the man sticks his leg out and Damian trips. Tony bounces to his feet, slamming his foot down on Damian's outstretched hand, probably breaking a finger. He scoops up the prod, slamming a heel into his stomach. Damian falls onto his back and Tony holds him down, seething, "Don't call him that."

Then he jams the prod into his side, digging the edge into Damian's stomach.

Too soon after, the the door bursts open and Tony's wrestled off of his enemy who is screaming and yelling, his body shaking and trembling. A few men go for him and he screams in fury, "Don't touch me! Get away!"

Tony's held by his arms as Damian gets up, still twitching and holding his injured hand. Tony winks, "I warned you. And you've had that coming for a while."

Damian doesn't say anything. He just flexes his good hand, staggers forward, and punches Tony across the face. Once, twice, before sinking his fist into his stomach. Tony coughs, spitting blood out onto the floor. A hand grips his head and yanks his curls up, Damian's eyes containing more fury than he has seen yet.

"You care about the kid," he demanded fiercely.

Tony spits blood in his face, earning another punch. "No, I don't, you close minded idiot. I care that you have no shred of humanity in you, and were prepared to electrocute a minor to death. But go for it, twist my words and actions to fit your agenda. I'm used to it by now."

"I will destroy you," Damian swore.

"Have fun with that buddy, because you think Peter was bad? You seem to forget what a pain in your ass I am," Tony narrowed his eyes. "You were right about one thing. He gets it from me. So let's have another session, but this time, tie your ropes better. Or I swear to God I'll break more than your finger, I'll snap your damn neck."

They exchange glares and Tony gives him a cocky grin, "This is definitely not how you envisioned this would go, is it?" Damian straightens at that sentence, rage filling him. Tony pouts his lip, "What? You want to hit me again? Go ahead, if it makes you feel better."

Damian wants to, but doesn't take the bait, which is smart. "Take them back. No food. No water. And call our friends," he seethes to one of his guards, still holding Tony's head up. "We're having an open house soon."

"And go ice that hand and nose," Tony suggests helpfully. "You're gonna have to kill me before I let you toss a kid to people worse than you who want to rip him limb from limb."

"I'll make clear orders not to kill him, don't worry," Damian smiles.

"Yeah, and I'll be given those orders too when I get out of here, but I don't think I'll be able to help myself," Tony snarls.

Damian punches him again, right on the jaw and Tony's head snaps to the side, his vision flashing white with pain. Then he lets his head drop and Damian storms out of the room. Tony breathes a small sigh of relief until he sees one of the men go over to Peter's side and grab his arm, trying to yank him to his feet. The kid is unconscious and the man still yells at him to stand. Tony struggles and shouts, "Look, he's passed out you idiots! Carry him, okay?"

He's suddenly shoved forward and the man behind him snarls, "You carry him."

The man holding Peter just drops him, and the kid hits the ground like a rag doll, his unconscious body flinching. Tony walks forward and kneels by the boy's side, his hands shaking as he rests one on his arm. Peter flinches again, his entire body twitching, eyes rolled up in the back of his head.

"Hey kid," he whispers. "It's just me, okay? I'm gonna lift you up."

"I've gotta lift you up kiddo, ok? Easy, easy," he whispers.

Peter tries to talk but all he does is cough up blood and tears build up in Peter's eyes as the kid tries to breath faster, his lungs and throat closing as he chokes on his own blood. Tony's heart his clenched with a cold fist and he desperately tries to calm him down, hearing his name being attempted with every gasp Peter gulps down.

"Tny- Tony- ny-"

Tony winces as he slips his hand underneath Peter's legs and pulls him to his chest, having horrible flashbacks that make his stomach churn as he eases Peter's head to rest on his shoulder. He stands on shaking legs and Tony feels a hand grip the back of his collar, pushing him forward. He gulps,

holding Peter tightly as he's lead down the hallway. Their door is opened and he's shoved in, staying on his feet. Tony looks to the side and sees the camera in the wall removed. He looks around for any others and doesn't find any.

Breathing a sigh of relief, he goes to the side of the room, easing Peter down and taking a look at the kid, cupping his cheek. Peter's head rolls into his hand and Tony curses. He looks worse than when he had been stabbed, soaked to the bone and sweating, his face contorted into that of pain. Tony mutters a curse, brushing the boy's bangs from his face as he calls his name a couple times, but Peter is out cold. The teenager is still shaking, convulsing like he's still being shocked.

Tony takes a seat next to him, knowing he can't help until the kid wakes up. He pulls Peter forward so that his head is propped against his thigh and squeezes his hand, trying to wake him. "You're okay Pete, just wake up for me, alright kid?"

Desperately trying to keep his voice from shaking, Tony pulls Peter into his lap so that he doesn't have to be on the cold ground and maybe try and warm him up; his shirt is dripping wet with icy water. Tony shivers, rubbing Peter's arms where he can because of all the burns. Knowing this is probably the first sleep the kid has gotten in a while he let's Peter rest against his chest and raises a shaky hand that settles on the kid's head. This was all his fault.

Peter whimpers in pain, his hands clenching behind him, still unconscious and Tony bites his lip, beginning to rub the boy's curls, sighing, "You did good, kid. You did good."

He leans his head against the wall and winces in pain, before his eyes close and he falls asleep, his fingers carding through Peter's wet hair. Not even five minutes later, Peter wakes up in a panic, gasping for air and pushing Tony away.

Tony jolts awake, recoiling in shock, his eyes flying open. "Peter!"

Once Peter finds out he can breathe, he's letting out cries of pain, frantically kicking and shoving him back. Tony moves away from him per his violent request, letting Peter out of his hold.

"Get away-" Peter sobs as he pushes aside Tony's arms. He falls backward, still horrible with balance due to the pain he went through and Tony catches him at the last minute, a hand gripping his shirt and his elbow which is free of the burns from the electrocution.

Afraid he's gonna hurt himself, Tony puts out his hands, trying to calm him down. Peter cries out in pain, thrashing and letting out choked screams, his eyes wide and fearful.

"Peter!" Tony shouts. "Peter, stop! Hey!" Peter's eyes lock onto him and they just crumple into hurt and pain and anger. Tony's face falls at that expression and he cries, "Kid, stop! It's done, okay, it's done!"

"It's n-not-" Peter cried, feeling the full pain of the burns. He curls up on himself before his legs kick. Peter's back arches as he relives the most painful moments of the past hour, squirming on the ground.

"Peter, look at me- look at me- kid please, you're gonna hurt yourself!" Tony pleads.

Peter glares at him and sobs, "Why- do you- care-"

"Peter, the mic is out and the camera. They can't hear us-" Tony informs him desperately, just wanting to help and take care of the teen he had allowed to go through so much pain.

"Why- do you- care?" Peter repeats more intensely, not changing his statement with even more

hate in his eyes.

Tony straightens in shock, and he stutters, "Peter, all that stuff I said- I didn't mean. And you didn't either. That was our plan-"

"All of it?" Peter hisses, tears streaming down his cheeks as he flinches, gritting his teeth as more pain ripples through his body.

"What are you talking about kid?" Tony demanded.

"I wish we hadn't met either, okay?" Peter sobs, shoving his hand away as he tries to catch his shoulder. Peter topples to the side, still not allowing help and he cries out as his arm buckles on him.

Tony's shocked. "Kid-" he chokes out.

"I hate you too, and I wish I was anywhere but here-" Peter says, tears streaming down his cheeks as he continues to try and straighten himself.

"I'm gonna get you out," Tony promises weakly. "I'm gonna get you out of here and then once I do, you won't have to see me again...okay?" He didn't know what he was saying, but he guessed it was what the kid wanted. Maybe the note he read was right after all, because what Peter was saying right now...

"This is your fault!" Peter yells fiercely.

Tony stares in shock and nods, "I- I know it is."

"I hate you," Peter cries.

Tony feels a lump in his throat and he whispers, "You should. I'm sorry."

"Stop acting like you care," Peter hisses, his gaze darkening before it completely breaks. His face falls and he whispers, "I heard your voicemail, okay?" The kid seemed shocked he let that slip, but once it did, it instilled a massive surge of words that came spilling out after. "What you wished you could have said? I heard it. Loud and clear. So you don't have to pretend anymore, Tony. I know you don't care-"

"I didn't-" Tony's brow furrows. Everything stops. What? Voicemail? He speaks slowly, licking his lips and finally finding his voice, "Peter, I- I didn't send you a voicemail."

Peter scoffs weakly, tearing up as he frantically shakes his head, "Don't lie to me, Tony. It's not gonna work. I know you did it, okay?"

"I don't lie to you," Tony said firmly. "I never have, and I never will."

"Just shut up," Peter says, putting his hands to his ears. "Stop- shut up-just stop-"

Tony, realizing a panic attack was half the reason for the kid's outburst, grabs his arm and stares him straight in the eyes, "Peter...I don't know what you think you heard, but I did not send you a voicemail."

Peter falters at his sincerity and horror, twisting his arm out of Tony's grip, but he doesn't break eye contact. "What?" Peter asks quietly, his breathing starting to slow as he calms himself down.

"Look, the day I went into your apartment to find you, there was a note, with my name on it. With

your handwriting. And it said that you hated me, and that you would never forgive me, and- and that you wished you and I never met and that I didn't care about you- is that what the voicemail said?"

"I- I didn't write that," Peter spluttered in shock.

"I know you didn't," Tony assured him. "They had someone copy your handwriting but I know your handwriting better than anyone because of all those hours at the lab, writing formulas with you and helping you with chem and math," Tony stutters, words coming out in a torrent to express how well he knew the kid and how much he wanted him to know the truth. "They connected their P's and didn't have stems on their a's-" he said weakly with a small laugh.

"I never connect my P's," Peter knits his eyebrows.

"I know you don't," Tony laughs happily at that sentence. He doesn't know why his heart broke just then, but it did and in that moment, all he wanted to do was set things right. He sobers his expression. "They did it to trick me, to make me think you wanted nothing to do with me, to get in my head."

"Tony I didn't write the note-" Peter insisted, his eyes wide like he had to convince him.

"Peter, dammit, I know that," Tony said firmly, seeing the kid's shoulders relax which at that moment, was the best thing in the world. "And I never sent you that voicemail, Peter. Whatever I said- or whatever they made me say, I know it hurt you and I'm sorry, but that was not me."

"You said you wished we never met," Peter whispered, his voice sounding like hearing that hurt more than any method of torture Damian put him through.

"And that wasn't me," Tony insisted, looking the boy dead in the eyes. "Peter, they're trying to get in your head. I knew something happened, before I got here, and that was it. Damian's messing with you, kid. But I didn't send you any voicemail or text or anything, I wish to God I did though, and it would be to say I was sorry, and that I had pushed away the most important thing in my life," Tony said, furious with himself. "You've got to believe me. Please, Pete."

Peter stared at him, his gaze breaking. Peter squeezed his eyes shut before he just slumped forward and Tony caught him out of instinct. An instinct that hadn't gone away but only been buried by anger and hate that meant nothing. Not understanding how important it was that Peter had fallen forward, knowing he would catch him, Tony took a deep breath for the first time in three months, pulling the shaking teen forward to his chest with one arm around him. It wasn't a hug; they weren't there yet. But it was an act of undying support. It was something.

Tony's hand fisted Peter's wet shirt and he bit the inside of his cheek, his other hand resting on Peter's head. The stitches were suddenly threaded in the wound between them that started to close. He regretted walking out, he regretted all the yelling, he regretted ever looking at the kid with anything close to hate and anger. The emotions that seemed so silly and so useless because when he saw the kid in pain on the ground in that room, all of that went away.

And maybe Damian would know that, and maybe it would get worse, but if Tony was going to die, he only had one thing he needed to do, and that was to make things right with Peter. The past three months he had realized what a mistake he made, but he was too worried about tracing his steps back because it seemed like the kid had moved on, and actually was better without him. But the fact that Peter had just been faking it like him, proved how similar they were.

Sure, Damian was probably right, they were codependent. One couldn't live without the other, they

had made that pretty clear. So as Tony held Peter with an arm supporting him, another hand thumbing through his dark curls, Tony was content. They were beaten to a pulp, in pain, and probably definitely 100% entirely screwed, but this was the first time they had both made contact willingly, and it was a start to going back to what they were.

Tony doubted they would ever get back to pre-Green Goblin times. They had changed, they were different people now, but they could definitely mend.

"I'm sorry," Peter said quietly, not making any effort to curl against him, and Tony making no effort to pull him closer. But there was an understanding that passed between the two of them.

"You've got nothing to be sorry for," Tony said back simply, shifting Peter in his arms so the kid wasn't leaning back on too many of his burns and so that his arms could fall loosely, his hands still cuffed behind him.

"You know some people say I'm sorry too," Peter muttered. Tony put his head against the wall, closing his eyes and smiling. "Oh I forgot," Peter drawled. "You don't apologize."

Tony knew he was kidding, but that line resonated with him. He swallowed, his hand stilling on Peter's head.

"Well that's what you wanted, right? You wanted to just sit there. You wanted me to just sit there. That was your big plan, remember?"

Tony shot him a look, "No, Pete, it wasn't-"

"So are we gonna pretend that massive fall out didn't happen? Is that why you're here? For once in your life are you going to apologize?"

"I didn't before, and that ended badly," Tony cleared his throat. "So yeah, I'm going to. I'm so sorry, kid. And I owe you more than that, I do. I know that doesn't make up for what happened, and I know we have a lot to talk about...but just know-

"That's enough," Peter sighed. "Don't apologize again. I didn't ask for you to turn it into a chick flick."

"Excuse me," Tony snorted in annoyance.

"What? I ask for two words, three if you say 'so' before 'sorry', and four if you don't use the contraction. You would have read me a novel if I hadn't stopped you," Peter sighed.

Tony couldn't help but smile and he looks down at Peter, "Well then I guess I should be thanking you for keeping me in check."

"Yeah, I can't believe you went three months without me," Peter muttered. "Must have been hell for you."

Tony blinked and clenched his hand to stop it from shaking, "Yeah, it was."

Peter didn't have the energy to look at him, but he would have if he could, "Yeah. Same." They were silent for a second and then Peter muttered, "You know you just screwed us, right? He's gonna know we've been lying. You flat out tackled him to get him away from me."

"I played it off and will continue to play it off until I can't anymore," Tony shrugged. "We'll figure it out."

Peter let out a happy laugh suddenly, his eyes fluttering shut, "You broke his nose."

"And a finger," Tony nodded. "He deserved it. He deserved worse."

"Next time let me take a swing at him," Peter said pointedly.

"You were a little passed out at the moment," Tony snorted and Peter suddenly hissed in pain as he shifted his leg. The burns and bruises were bad, but at least Tony figured the water was out. He asked nervously, "Are you healing?"

Peter licked his lips and nodded, his body suddenly shuddering, "Slowly. Hey, you were the one who gave in, not me."

Tony smiled slightly, shaking his head, "Always a competition."

Peter doesn't have an answer to that. Cue another two minutes of silence, but it speaks a million words. Eventually, Tony feels Peter's head grow heavy and the kid croaks, "I c-can't."

"Pete, you've been awake for a week straight. Close your eyes. I'll watch," Tony said firmly, keeping his eyes trained on the door, staying alert.

"Just wake me up if-" Peter stutters weakly.

"What, you don't trust me?" Tony asks weakly. He waits for Peter to say no, but the kid doesn't object. And that means more to him than the teen knew. Instead his chin slumps to his chest and Tony eases Peter's head onto his shoulder, looping his arm firmer around the shaking boy to support his weight.

He looks around the room and curses under his breath, muttering, "Come on guys. You're cuttin it close, don't you think?"

"Okay, so we've got about 5 names we didn't pick up on," Natasha said, closing the computer, back on the jet, "and locations of two of them. Klaue has eyes on both and will track them. The minute they get back from wherever, we'll know where they visited."

"Which is hopefully where Tony and Peter are," Rhodey nodded.

"*Do we trust him?*" Bruce asked on the screen that showed the Avengers in the lab.

"He wasn't in the position to lie. Literally the position," Natasha snorts.

Bruce shrugged, "*True, but doesn't that guy...lie and stab people in the back for a living?*"

"We've got insurance. For right now, the market thinks we wanted to discuss a case about Vibranium. And we faked a transfer of money into his account to make it look like we paid him. Everyone's falling head over heels for the guy on the black market who has the Avengers under his belt. That's what they think. In reality, if he doesn't get us the location from his contacts, we expose him and every single one of his ports, and let the world know what he was actually doing- which is helping us," Steve says firmly.

"So we're closing in," Clint nods from the pilot's seat. "Because Vision also just told us we got footage of the car. They avoided security cameras as best they could, but we got a frame of their licence plate."

"FRIDAY's doing a trace," Wanda nodded, "because the plate belonged to a John Doe with a fake address."

"What about May?" Steve asked.

Bucky shakes his head, crossing his arms and leaning against a lab counter, *"Fine. Everything's normal. I'm guessing they just wanted her out of the way. Emails have continued as usual. She doesn't suspect a thing. Speaking of people suspecting a thing, Pepper's coming back from her conference in a couple days..."*

Steve cursed, "Well hopefully we get them back by then. I don't want her in the loop, for her own good."

Rhodey nodded, "Okay. So we're close."

Natasha sighed, daring to smile weakly, "Let's hope so."

May finished filing some of the paperwork and let out a sigh. There was suddenly a hand on her arm and May jumped, laughing and clutching her chest, "Chris, you scared me. Is everything okay?"

"I was going to ask the same thing," he said nervously, obviously noticing her worry. He studies her face and asks slowly, "Have you been sleeping?"

May gave a small smile, "As much as I can....which is not a lot. I'm worried about my nephew."

"Peter," he said slowly, biting his lip to remember. "Right?"

May nods, "Yeah. There was a fiasco with his phone, and I just haven't talked to him face to face in a while. And I don't know when I'll get a chance to- it's just bad timing, all of it. I was really excited about this trip, and I thought I would never want to leave...but now all I want to do is get home and make sure he's okay."

"I can send him a phone if you want? Or have someone go and talk to him or something," Chris suggested vaguely. "You could talk to Jan and she could let you leave early? Claim it's a family emergency."

May laughed and patted his shoulder, "I appreciate your support, but no. No, I'm sure everything is fine and this is my job, people need me here."

"We sure do," he admits.

May shoots him a grateful look and shakes her head, tucking her hair behind her ear, "Just, he was sick for a while and I know I'm not his mother but it's always been...us." She sighs and smiles weakly, motioning with her hand, "and I couldn't take care of him when he just had a cold. It's stupid, I know. But I couldn't imagine if something bad happened to him and I wasn't there. But now he's back in the groove. Busy with friends and school and we talk through email." She rolled her eyes and drawled, "He's a teenager so I'm starting to get the feeling that I'm missing him more than he's missing me. He's probably not even worried."

"They're like that," Chris nodded. "Mine's in college. Enjoy this now, because later they're gonna be crawling back asking for money, food, and laundry."

May smirked, "Oh yeah?"

Chris nodded, "Yeah." He motioned for the door, "I gotta go run some paperwork over but take care of yourself, May. Go eat something and take the day off to maybe get some sleep."

"I will Chris, thanks," she smiled weakly, checking her phone for a new email as he smiled and walked away. When her inbox read no new messages, she reread the last one that was sent to her and sighed, before going to fill up a cup of coffee.

Chapter End Notes

YEET OK SO A LOT TO UNPACK

I had coffee so I'm hyper. At least Tony and Peter fixed some stuff, but that also means they're kinda sorta definitely screwed. Teehheeeeee don't kill me. I promise it will all work out for the most part. Next chapter a lot goes down, but we are nearing the Avengers finally closing in! So it's all winding down but that does not mean we are slowing down muhahahah much more to come!

Please tell me what you thought about the chapter and leave a comment, I love hearing from all you guys, its so awesome and encouraging <3

New chapter in 4 days ish h h h h h h h h lets hope haha and until then, enjoy summerrrrrrrr and try not to die from suspense!

I love you all 3000 <3

Blast From The Past

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyyy lovely readers!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Here's a new chap muhahahahaha it's a lil late sry lol but omg I really like this one :) :) lot of dialogue which is my fav, but we also dive into the climax and let me tell ya it's gonna be awesome!!!

Thank you all once again for your support and comments and kudos, they are insane and I am floored by yalls response!! Thank you so so much <3

I reallyyyyyy like this chapter, and i hope you do too! Hope you all are enjoying your summer, and I'm so thrilled yall are liking the story- I'm having a blast writing it!

Ok ok I won't keep ya anymore, I'm gonna go award myself with coffee XD

Read on!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter finally got some sleep, passed out against Tony's shoulder for a good two hours. Tony didn't move to tighten his arm around him and Peter didn't lean any closer to him. In fact neither moved; Tony's eyes bore into the door, barely blinking. It was a silent uncommunicated agreement of mending, and Tony wasn't about to screw it up. Besides, it wasn't like he and the kid were...good. They had said some things they could never take back, and until that became the topic of discussion, he wasn't exactly willing to hug and make up. All he knew was that Peter was hurt, and he needed him. And hopefully vice versa. They ground each other, kept each other sane and strong. And Tony felt better with the kid at his side. At least until he heard commotion.

His gaze snapped alert and he twitched his shoulder roughly, hissing, "Kid." Only one word was needed, which said volumes.

Peter awoke instantly and he and Tony moved apart in sync, creating a foot of space between them before slowly standing. Tony took this opportunity to look the teen over, relieved to see most of the burns healing. The torture was still displayed, but recovery was also obvious.

The door opened and Damian walked in, his finger in a splint, his nose slightly swollen. The man still maintained his saunter and the cold look in his eyes, but if anything was added to his long list of charming characteristics, it was a large weight of exhaustion and anger that was placed on his shoulders. That made Tony smile.

"Aw, Dames, what happened to your finger?" Tony asked innocently.

Tony was the first one he glared at when he walked into the room so his gaze was already trained on him, but as he opened his mouth to speak, someone else beat him to it. "Is it just me or does your nose seem crooked?" Peter asked.

Damian's lips clamped shut and curled slightly, sighing as he looked down in as if he was told a bad joke. He looked up and the annoying smirk was back as he asked, "How have you boys been?"

That was not what Tony was expecting him to say. "Well it's only been two hours, so...about the same as I was two hours ago," Tony nodded slowly. He hated many things about this man, but the one thing he hated most was the fact that 2% of the time, he was completely unpredictable.

"Speak for yourself," Peter scoffed at him, standing straighter. "I'm doing a lot better. Ready to go another round? I think this time I'll start listing off all my old locker combinations," Peter grinned cockily.

"Well I'm glad you're ready for another round, Peter, because that's exactly what you're gonna get. I'm tired of explaining myself to you both, and while I relish in dramatic effect and taking my time, I would like to get right to the point with this one, for the sole reason that I am excited to see where it goes," he said simply, a calm smile on his face. "I won't be the one you get to spend time with today, Peter," Damian said slowly.

Peter nodded in understanding, "Oh, so it's one of your minions? Got it, you don't want to get your hands dirty. I respect that. Or can you not punch anymore with that finger."

"Oh I can punch," Damian snarled in retaliation.

"Come on, take a swing then. How about *you*, Damian, ready for round two?" Tony asked, wiggling his eyebrows. Peter's shoulders lowered and Tony's raised. It was a small shift of attention, Tony making himself the main target for any punch the man threw, since Peter's hands were still cuffed behind him, as they had been for a while.

Damian took a breath before he sighed, "I should let that get to me, but once again, I'm not in the mood."

"Did you do some meditation and yoga while you were gone?" Peter scoffed in awe.

"They say it can make you a whole new man. Was it tai chi? I hear that works wonders," Tony exclaimed, exchanging a nod with Peter.

"I'm flattered," Damian nodded. "Truly. But to go back a couple truly intriguing sentences, and no, it's not one of my minions, Peter. It's one of *your* very good friends. They would like to have a few words with you."

It clicked with Tony faster. "Damian, I swear to God-" he growled. The people Peter put behind bars wanted some quality time with his kid, and Tony wouldn't let that happen.

"So if you don't mind, Peter, coming with me-" Damian took a step forward.

Tony immediately sidestepped without thinking, cutting him off. He placed himself directly in front of Peter, effectively blocking the man's route in the most threatening and blatant way possible. It was a dumb move, a stupid move, a *revealing* move, but his legs moved on their own, out of instinct. Doing any other action went against his deepest moral fibers. It wasn't even a thought. It was an internal compulsion.

Damian froze, eyeing him warily, a small curl of his lips forming. His tone was delicate and taunting, "This is strike two, Tony, in your 'I Hate Peter skit'. What are you doing?"

"If you don't have to explain yourself to us, then I don't have to explain myself to you," Tony said simply, staring him down, his feet firmly planted.

"Us?" Damian caught, raising an eyebrow. "You speak for Peter now?"

"He likes to think he does," Peter snarled from behind him, shoving him hard in his good shoulder and stepping out from behind him. "He's playing hero again. Hey, wasn't this the reason we got into the fight in the first place?" Peter sneered, shaking his head. "You never learn, do you?"

It was a clear warning. You screwed up once, Peter told him with his eyes, don't do it again. Let me go this time.

The boy was telling him he could take it, heck, he was *asking* him to let him take it again. Tony let out a laugh with a viscous bite at the end of it as he turned on him and shook his head in disgust. "Kid, we have our issues, but whether you chose to believe it or not, I still have a heart, regardless of the name of the brat being threatened," Tony hissed at him.

Damian clasped his hands, snapping both of their gazes towards him, "Well now that's settled-" He took another step towards Peter who flinched and backed up towards the wall in instinct. It was caution, not fear, but Peter clearly saw it as a sign of the latter, his cheeks flushed red. Tony didn't blame him for stepping away and hated that he was embarrassed by it. When a man puts a cattle prod to your stomach near fifty times, that's reason enough to want to be as far away from him as possible.

Tony, to support him, stepped forward and he raised a finger, swearing, "Back off Damian. I'm warning you."

"Words hurt Tony," Damian pouted.

"So does my fist. Take another step, I dare you," he said darkly, his eyes flashing. "This isn't about the kid anymore, it's between you and me. Always has been. You trying to exploit my weaknesses that don't exist? Consistently and persistently? How do you think that makes me feel?" Tony snarled. "I'll give you a hint: I'm pissed now."

Damian winced, "I couldn't give a crap about your feelings, Tony. Now move aside, or you will be moved. Not by me," he added quickly. "Because I don't want to waste effort."

The door opened and two men came in and Tony straightened, biting his cheek while chuckling, "Coward's way out. Nice play."

"Checkmate," Damian winked, stepping back. While the men wrestled Tony into compliance, he turned to Peter who had been watching against the wall. He narrowed his eyes and asked, "You're awfully quiet, Peter?"

Peter smiled, "Just thinking of what I'm going to say to my old pals. I'm sure they'll be thrilled to see me."

Damian nodded, "Oh, yeah. I mean, I figure so, due to the amount of money I got."

"Congratulations. Your own personal fight club," Peter snickered.

Damian smirked back and raised an eyebrow as he closed in on him, Peter backed into a corner. "Well it won't be much of a fight," he laughed. Damian reached and grabbed Peter's arm, pulling him forward and the kid stumbled but followed against his will.

"And where's the fun in that?" Tony yelled, struggling against the two men holding him before Peter could be led out the door. "No, seriously," he insisted, as Damian paused, Tony's heart pounding. "How boring is it gonna get, watching each guy pummel the kid? You want some action, don't you? At least let him be able to defend himself."

Damian considered this and made a face. "Hold still, Pete," he sighed, suddenly pinning the teen against the wall and slipping a syringe out of his pocket. Tony let out a yell as he ruthlessly jabbed it into Peter's neck. The kid grit his teeth and let out a small cry, shoving Damian away once the needle was pulled out. Peter winced, bringing his shoulder to his neck as he ducked his head in

shock.

"What was that?" Tony demanded furiously, flinching as Peter's knees buckled and he slid down the wall to the floor, blinking harshly as if to stay awake. His eyelids fluttered and Peter took a heavy breath.

"I agree. I want a show to watch when I'm bored, so I *will* release his cuffs. But in case you've forgotten, Tony, he's also Spiderman, so this evens out the fight a tiny bit. I can't have him winning again, can I?" Damian said with a smile.

Tony's chest heated up with pure anger and he thrashed in the iron grips of the men that held his arms. Damian dug a small device out of his other pocket and flicked his hand and the two men holding Tony let him go. He shoved them off and looked up as Damian held out the device. The man motioned to the small remote in his hand, "Take it."

Tony walked forward slowly but just as he reached for it, Damian curled his other fist and punched him in the stomach. Tony doubled over and snarled, about to swing back but Damian raised a finger and put the remote back in his pocket, muttering, "Ah, ah, ah, you want it, don't you?"

Tony glared at him, his eyes flashing. He uncurled his fist and lowered it despite every muscle in his body screaming for him not to, his eyes trained on the ground. His body shook in anger as he curled his fingers around the end of the small grey remote. Damian still held the other end and Tony looked him dead in the eye.

The man grinned and sighed, "Just one more."

"You sick, son of a-" Tony didn't move- he barely flinched as he got clocked across the face. Yanking the remote out of Damian's hands, he backed away, touching the back of his wrist to his bleeding lip before turning to Peter. The kid was looking at him in fury, but the guilt underneath the anger was what was truly meant for him. Tony knelt by his side, supporting his back with one hand as he fiddled with the device next to Peter's cuffs to remotely unlock them.

"You okay?" he asked quietly, twisting so he could shield Peter with his body.

"Yeah, just a little...spinny at the moment," Peter gulped, concentrating to probably correct his vision as whatever drug pumped through his veins. Then turned his head like he was looking at the cuffs but actually just leaned towards Tony, his head knocking against Tony's chest. He hissed, "You didn't have to do that."

"Yeah I did, shut up. I'm gonna kill this guy-" Tony swore, pressing the device against the titanium.

"I can take it," Peter said weakly as his cuffs snapped open. He was cut off by his own relived sigh as he flexed his hands, pain written all over his face. He quickly hid his wrists from Tony, bring them in front of him, but the man had caught the sight of the burned and bloody skin. Tony gave him a look and Peter gave him one back.

"You fight, you understand me?" Tony swore silently. There was a lot of meaning in that sentence. Words that could not be risked out loud, but that Tony voiced all the same. You fight, because I can't lose you again. I'm proud of you. You remember what I taught you, understand?

Peter nodded discretely, speaking a million words of his own. The kid gave him a weak smile and it took everything within Tony to not rub his curls like he used to. All that anger he ever had for the kid dissolved away in an instant and Tony helped him stand, a hand on his back to support him as

he regained his balance.

"I can take it," Peter repeated more firmly, twisting his wrists and shaking them out. He blinked and his gaze focused, nodding to Tony. I can take it because you need me. I can take it because I need to get back to you. I can take it because I will never forget what you taught me.

Tony got it loud and clear and his eyes shone with pride that he tried to cover up with anger as they both snapped into the character's they had built and become less and less like over the past hours.

"Let's go, Peter," Damian smiled fakely.

"He's not going anywhere with you," Tony snarled, unable to help it. A last ditch attempt.

"Yes I am." That was surprisingly Peter. The kid swallowed, clearly scared, but he was trying not to show it.

"Well it seems we have a conflict of-"

"Shut up, Damian," they both snapped.

Peter smiled weakly and shrugged, "Who doesn't want to go to a reunion?"

"That's the spirit," Damian clasped his hands. "Tony, don't worry. They won't kill him."

"Good," Tony snarled coldly. "Because then I would have to kill you."

"Is this strike three for you?" Damian wiggled his eyebrows.

Tony cocked his head, "Yeah sure, for being a good person? Sorry I just have a conscious. I wouldn't send a sixteen year old to die, no matter who it is. So he either comes back alive, or you're gonna have to kill me before I end you, got it?"

The truth in Tony's words was meant for Peter, who received it and straightened.

"Don't worry Tones," Damian winked at him. "You're gonna be stuck with me for the majority of the time. Just let me walk Peter out." He man turned to the hesitant teenager. "Let's go, Pete. You can do this walking or crawling. Your choice."

"Don't call me that." Peter gladly walked to the door and stopped, moving to the side and waving his hand forward respectfully, "Ladies first." Damian's nostrils flared but he kept his mouth shut, yanking the door open. Peter gave him a cocky grin, "Yeah, you go out into the hall, take a sec to think of a witty comeback, and then get back to me."

Peter walked through the door after Damian and it took everything within him to not turn around. Tony had fought for him, twice. He had tackled Damian to get the man away from him- broken his finger and nose, he had carried him back into the room, he hadn't sent the voicemail, he threatened Damian, and made the man unlock his cuffs so that Peter had a better chance with the criminals.

Now Damian had him to himself for the rest of the day, with a bunch of left over anger to take out on Tony. The only thing worse than Tony getting hurt because of him, was Tony getting hurt without him there to fight for him. Peter had bit his tongue since the man had gotten here, but when something inside Tony snapped earlier- he saw it- it snapped inside him too.

When the door shut behind him, Peter made up his mind. The two guards were right behind him so

he waited until he had followed Damian around a corner before ducking and shoving both elbows back, slamming them into the men's groins. In deep concentration, he spun and kicked them into each other, their heads hitting the corner of the wall they had just turned. Then he slammed his heel into the side of the nearest man's head, which knocked both skulls together, effectively rendering both unconscious.

It hadn't even been a second and Peter quickly spun, lunging to grab Damian around the throat as he slammed him into the wall. Pain sent shocks up his recently uncuffed wrist but he barely felt it, anger coursing through his veins, burning through the last bit of the drug he had been given. "You listen to me," Peter snarled in his face, deadly serious. "If he is not in one piece, I will kill you, do you understand me?"

Damian groaned in pain, trying to shove him off and Peter pulled him back a couple inches before slamming him into the wall again, harder this time, and a small dangerous smile that even shocked Peter appeared on his own face. He could feel it against his lips. Footsteps headed down the hallway, and he knew he had limited time before he was yanked off of the man. He just needed one thing-

"Do I make myself frickin clear? I will rip you *apart*," Peter seethed, his eyes flashing as he curled his fingers tightened. There it was. The flicker of fear. Sensing he had won, he let go of Damian as a guard ran up and Peter backed away, raising his hands in surrender.

Damian straightened and waved the guard off, clutching his throat. Peter gave him a forced smile, "Glad we're on the same page. Lead the way, Dames."

Steve had been watching the phone for the past hour. They were closing in on the location via street cams, tracking the path of the vehicle they had zeroed in on. Between Tony's phone signal and the video footage, they had narrowed it to a pretty large radius, but it was better than a whole city. Scans were being done on every warehouse in that district, but there were a lot of them, most owned by people with fake names, probably used for drug deals or illegal manufacturing. So Steve had resorted to Klaue, who was supposed to call that phone, the minute he got his supposed coordinates.

Steve had memorized the ring of the burner phone they had set up, and he had heard in his mind a couple times, the way you hear your phone buzz or your name called when it actually hadn't. He felt stupid putting all his cards on a criminal. No...stupid wasn't the right word...desperate. That was the perfect word. Desperate he was. So he prayed that phone would ring as he sat staring at it, his eyes glued, his leg tapping against the floor.

Natasha came in along with Rhodey. She sank down on the couch next to him, Rhodey with his arms crossed, leaning against the nearby doorway in front of him.

Steve surprised himself by licking his lips and speaking first, "You know, I've been so distracted with finding them, I haven't even thought about what to do when we find them."

"We burn the place to the ground and get them the hell out of there," Rhodes said firmly.

Steve gave him a weak smile, "That's our plan?"

Natasha nodded, "Yes. That's our plan. And it's gonna work. Because those are our boys, and the minute we lay eyes on that base, no plan is prepare us. We'll know what to do."

Steve nodded, "It's not like it's our first rodeo."

"Whatever it takes," Rhodey added from across the room.

Steve nodded again, more thoughtfully this time as he thought over what that sentence entailed and how willing he was to follow it, rubbing the back of his neck. Then he asked slowly, "Do you even think Peter's gonna want to...come back?"

Silence.

With everything that kid had been through, he had a right to hate them.

Natasha's voice was quiet. "We have no idea what they did to him, or said to him, or how they used Tony and him against each other. I don't know what's gonna be left of their relationship after this. But this one is on us, so whatever the kid wants, we respect. I think we all should agree on that."

Everyone sat in agreement without speaking, because that was easier than admitting their mistake. Ashamed, they then resumed the quiet room, stewing in their guilt and worry. At least until the phone rang.

When it did, everyone looked up in equal shock, staring at it like that wasn't what phones were supposed to do, or that they weren't expecting a call. In that moment, Steve forgot how phones even worked, he only knew that it was... ringing.

"Answer it," Nat said, licking her lips and finding her voice.

Steve looked over at her incredulously and nodded, reaching his hand out and picking up the cell, slamming his thumb down clumsily on the green button. He put it to his ear, the cold screen not evoking even a flinch. He struggled with what to say, but luckily he didn't have to speak first.

"I have a location."

Steve's vision sharpened and he stood, briskly rounding the table and walking to the lab, snagging his shield as he walked by, the others in hot pursuit, already texting the Avengers. "Where?"

"Sending coordinates now. It's about an forty minute jet ride from where you are."

"What else do you know?" Steve demanded, passing the lab as Bucky joined him at his side, clicking a magazine into his machine gun and nodding firmly.

"I know there are a couple baddies there right now, waiting their turn to get a crack at their nemesis. And the same man brags he has Tony Stark but no one believes him. You boys have covered press well. He's definitely not making it easy to miss, I'm surprised I didn't hear about it sooner. I guess some of my contacts don't indulge in the juicy stuff like I like to."

"You're sounding deflated, do I have to shove my shield down your throat? Because I will." Steve's tone never wavered, and Klaue hurt the truth behind what he said.

"Noted, noted. I did what you asked. I expect those fake numbers in my bank to turn real within 24 hours."

"If I feel like it. Text me if you find out anything else."

"Pay me."

"I'll have Barton stick an arrow right up your-"

"Done."

Steve hung up and marched to the jet, the Avengers flanking him. His eyes bore into the ground as he stormed forward, his white knuckles gripping his shield strap. Steve felt his phone buzz at his side and he saw coordinates pop up. He tossed his phone to Nat who nodded as her alert gaze skimmed the location.

The garage door opened and they got on the jet, Nat and Clint slipping into the cockpit and already entering the numbers and prepping for take off, pulling the strips of leather over their chests in unison and putting on their headsets.

No one spoke. There was no need to. Everything seemed so simple at the moment, like a well oiled machine working perfectly, as if they had waited for this very moment, which they had. They had all pictured this moment, of realization that they in fact, had a lead. But it also made this nightmare that much more real.

If there were worries, they were masked by pure calmness and a sudden drive that filled the jet with such tension, Steve felt like he was going to scream. Normal people may have brushed it off as professionalism, but Steve felt the anger, the fear, the determination that rolled off each one of his teammates in waves.

A combined sleep amount of probably 30 hours between all of them over the past few days, and they suddenly weren't tired. The Avengers worked with ease, the jet already lifting off, not to waste time.

This had been a rough and complex journey searching desperately for answers through tapes, through trackers, through satellites, emails... hours of torture that dug into their hearts when realizing that Peter and Tony had it much worse. They tried not to imagine what was happening, because they knew they probably couldn't get close, but it still plagued daily conversation.

Nights of ducking aside while someone else got coffee at 4 am, only to get it once they were gone, and have someone behind you around the corner waiting. When they woke up it was smiles and assurances that they all slept like a baby. Lies of how they were doing because it didn't seem important, not when their family was in pain.

Ironic that the solution to this complex spiderweb of chaos was a simple phone call and a few numbers.

Steve was just relieved that cell rang.

"What, one of your guards turn on you?" Tony asked. He had been moved to a different room and cuffed to the chair, waiting in the dark until his enemy walked through the door and flicked on the light, making Tony squint. But as he did, Damian couldn't hide his red throat, the hand that was trying not to clutch it, or his lathered breathing.

"Peter, actually," the man corrected slowly, pondering his statement as if he didn't believe it was true. "Peter threatened me."

"Did you tell him you'd break his LEGO death star?" Tony asked in confusion.

"No," Damian muttered, looking up at him. "I guess I implied I'd break you."

"News flash buddy," Tony winked. "You can't break something that's already broken. Not by you,

of course," he added sweetly. "I've been a wreck for a while, completely unrelated," Tony shot a cocky smile."

Damian closed the door behind him and shrugged, "You don't seemed phased by Peter's outburst. I thought he hated you."

Tony made a face, "You seem to not understand what it means to be a decent human being. You don't give a crap if someone you hate gets hurt. But no matter who the person is, you don't wish the were tortured to death, especially a kid. Except for you. I kinda wish you were dead. Sorry, was that mean?" Tony winced apologetically.

"Don't worry. I don't mind," Damian shrugs, narrowing his eyes and rubbing his chin. "So when Peter threatens to put a bullet in my head if I didn't keep you in one piece..."

"Do you also consider the fact that he's Spiderman?" Tony interrupted. "His entire MO is saving people. I'm Iron Man. Peter knows the world needs me alive, so he's taking one for the team because that's the self sacrificial time bomb he is. Do you know what the world would do without Iron Man?"

Damian pulled up a chair across from him and spread his hands in a cocky fashion. It reminded Tony of himself, but there wasn't enough bite in his tone; Damian had obviously just been recently shaken. "They're doing just fine, now."

Tony smiled and looked down, "Yeah, and if aliens attack in the next couple days, you keep me locked in here buddy, see how that works for you. Of course, I'm not gonna be here much longer. And then I'm killing you."

"I see," Damian nodded. "So you and Peter both just have conciousness, and that's why you are throwing yourselves in front of bullets for each other, defending each other, being extremely protective, and being dangerously codependent."

"Yes," Tony exclaimed in success, laughing slightly. "Look, you're finally getting it! I'd clap if I could. Truth me told, I didn't think this day would come but I guess you don't have a negative IQ after all. It's just 0."

"So you don't think of him as a son?" Damian asked, as if just to clarify, ignoring Tony's insult with ease.

Tony sighed in annoyance, holding back a wince, "No."

"Didn't your mother tell you it's not nice to lie?" Damian tisked, wiggling his eyebrows knowingly.

"No, she died before she could teach me manners. Sore subject," Tony said dryly, faking a smile.

"Oh, sorry, did I hit a sweet spot?" Damian grinned.

Tony maintained his smile and nodded, "Yeah, you did. Want me to hit one back?"

Damian spread his hands in amusement, "Go for it. "

"Why did you get more pissed at me in that room when we just had a little fun tossing a few punches then when Peter told you off for a total of forty two minutes while being tortured?" Tony asked.

"I-" Damian scoffed.

"The kid was right," Tony admits. "You need to invest in a punching bag. You lash out violently to compensate for not being able to in every other way simply because you can. So what was his name?"

"Who's name?" Damian asked, making a face and crossing his arms.

"You're crossing your arms, that means I'm close. First sign of lying: closing yourself off," Tony told him calmly.

"You really should be a lawyer, Tony. Or in the FBI," Damian sneered.

"It's common body language, but thanks." Tony shrugged, relaxing in the chair. "I watch a lot of Boston Legal, Criminal Minds, and Sherlock. Between those three, you pick up a few things."

"Who's name?" Damian growled again, firmer this time. He was curious, self consciously uncrossing his arms in the process.

"The kid who bullied you when you were little," Tony said back, cocking his head.

Damian snickered, but his confident glance dropped another peg, and Tony stepped up one. The man snickered shook his head, "You're grasping at straws."

"Am I?" Tony narrowed his eyes. "Here's another question for you. Who'd you lose? Was it a girlfriend? A wife?"

Silence.

Jackpot.

Damian's gaze faltered and he licked his lips as he made a face, his voice cracking only slightly, but Tony caught it. The man hissed, "What?"

Tony watched his eyes without blinking. "You heard me. Girlfriend? Wife?"

Damian rolled his eyes and Tony nodded, "Ok, not married. Don't blame the ladies. Ok, uh mom? Dad?"

A flicker of hate flashed in the man's gaze and his jaw clenched. Tony grinned, "Oh you hated him, good to know. Sister? Brother-"

Damian's eye twitched ever so slightly and Tony stopped.

"Brother," he repeated thoughtfully, studying the man's breaking gaze. He smiled triumphantly and spat, "I'm sorry for your loss."

Damian surged forward, pointing a finger at Tony's face, "You don't know anything about me."

Tony straightened in his chair and took a deep breath, "I know you had an older brother, and I'm guessing he always looked out for you, was kind of like a father to you when your old man wasn't around, which was always. He died and you were left to fend for yourself, but problem was...you couldn't. So Billy, let's call him Billy, had a wide open opportunity, until you punched back. And it felt good. And you felt powerful. Until he clocked you across the head," Tony snorted.

"Stop," Damian said quietly, staying where he was.

"Make me," Tony said quickly, talking faster. "So then just a punch wasn't enough for you. You

went off the map, got involved with the wrong people, because they said they could make you feel the same way again. But you couldn't stand to work for someone, so you branched off, treated people like crap and fed off of the same feelings that made you feel powerful and strong, like Billy, the guy who you could never beat. You *became* him because you didn't want to lose. You *coward*."

"I said stop," Damian repeated, but once again, he didn't move, as if his feet were nailed to the floor.

"And I said make me," Tony snapped back. He waited a second, daringly, just to mess with him, before starting up again, gaining momentum. "So then you're up to your knees in blood and you have an awakening, that maybe, just maybe, you're doing something wrong. But it's too late. You're in too deep, so you stay in, and get sucked deeper, and deeper until you don't even feel the blood anymore even though it hasn't just covered your arms, no...you're *drowning* in it."

Damian gives him a weak smile, "Maybe it feels good."

Tony ignores him so he can deliver the hard hit, "And then you find Peter and I, a relationship that is broken and torn apart but you mistake it for a codependent, protective, loving relationship that reminds you of what you had with your brother and it pisses you off so much that you attack it and you try and rip it apart," Tony snarled. "Because if you couldn't have it, no one can."

"You're wrong," Damian hissed.

"Then move. Punch me. Prove me right. Shut me up!" Tony yelled, his breathing getting faster as he worked himself up. "Shut up me, Damian!" Tony leaned forward in his cuffs and snarled, "That's right, you can't! Because I'm hitting a little too close to home. Do you want me to continue?"

"No," Damian whispered, and for the first time in those couple days, Tony saw true fear on the man's face. Tony had found the chink in the armor, so he didn't stop.

"Great, I'll keep going. You're mad at your brother, pissed that he left you, even though it probably an accident, not even his fault." Tony caught a wince and he raised an eyebrow and whispered, "It was yours, wasn't it? Or at least you think it is. Everyone told you it wasn't but you didn't believe them."

Damian avoided his gaze and Tony nodded, "So you take it out on me, urging me to protect that kid, and then you take it out on Peter, urging him to to protect me the way you should have protected your brother. In your messed up mind, it makes sense. Because you are *messed up*. You use your fists because it's all you've ever done. You feed on power but deep down, you are just the same scared little boy you always were."

Tony finally stops, breathing hard and taking a gulping breath. He didn't realize he had been yelling but his voice was sore and Tony swallowed painfully, cocking his head. His gaze focuses on Damian's eyes which are filled with...

"Wow," Tony says quietly. "I didn't realize you were human."

Silence once again. The room drips with tension and shattered pasts.

Damian looked down at the floor, scuffing the top of his shoe. He smiles weakly, "I guess I'm full of surprises." When he looked up, the tears were gone, replaced by a daunting stare as he leaned forward and asked for permission. "Allow me?"

Tony nodded, "Be my guest."

"You know so much about me because you are me," Damian said slowly with a small smirk.

Tony gasped, "You got me! I'm a lunatic who keeps people in their dungeons and tries to kill teenagers, how did you know?"

Normally, Damian would take the bait, but as a result of Tony breaking something inside of him, he's not effected by it. Instead Damian points at him, like that proved his point, "And you try and mask that with your cockiness, and your egotistical, witty comebacks...but that's all you have. You've wrapped yourself in a suit of armor because you're vulnerable on the inside. And as for the kid, you let Peter slip away, in fact, you *pushed* him away, out of your life."

There's a lump in Tony's throat that he's desperately trying to swallow. He meets Damian's gaze with questioning eyes, gritting his teeth. How did he-

"We've both lost someone, Tony," Damian answers, even though Tony hadn't voiced his thoughts. He shrugs and mutters, "It takes one to know one I guess. But I came to terms that I can't get mine back. Have you?"

Tony cocked his head and sighed, "Interesting hypothesis."

"There you go again," Damian clapped. "At what age did you resort to humor as your coping mechanism?"

"Five," Tony said instantly with a proud smile.

"So you've always been this cocky?" Damian nodded in understanding.

"Afraid so," Tony winced.

"And how many people know it's just an act?" Damian asked innocently, putting his hands in his back pockets as he paced back and forth.

"Just my stuffed animals," Tony assured him.

Damian smiles, pointing at him with a chuckle, "Another quip to hide the fact that you're concerned people might see past your flashy smiles and the sunglasses that hide your eyes that could quite possibly reveal what Tony Stark truly feels. You've convinced everyone in your world that you aren't afraid of anything, that you can do anything, because you can, because you're not afraid to *die*, you're afraid to *fail*."

Tony shifted in his chair, scoffing, and Damian spread his arms, "You carry the weight of the world on your shoulders not for honorable reasons, but because you somehow think it's your responsibility. You have a *need* to save everyone, and you don't care what it does to you. You thrive on it, even when the guilt and the 'job' makes you lose people." He winks but there's a twinge of sadness in his voice, "You see, Tony...we're both addicted to power in our own twisted ways. And we're both drowning in blood," Damian said quietly, his voice lingering in a taunting manner, "in our own, twisted, ways..."

Tony looks up but says nothing. He won't tell him to stop; he won't stoop that low. So Damian continues, "You're constantly looking for ways out, to cheat the system, because you hate confrontation, but you love a good argument, where you can plaster that facade over what's really there-" he turns around with a grin. "Make me stop Tony, I know you want to, shut me up," he mocks, echoing Tony's words before narrowing his eyes. "Or am I hitting too close to home?"

Tony forces a smile, "I think it's pretty clear your pops didn't give you enough hugs."

"Neither did yours," Damian snaps back coldly. Tony freezes, his hands curling into fists. "Yeah, that's right," Damian nods. "Let that sink in for a second. We both have daddy issues."

"Too bad you can't make fun of mine without remembering yours," Tony snarled. It was an insurance policy, just in case Damian thought he could, now that Tony mentioned his father, they could steer clear of the subject. But now Damian was going in a route that hurt far more than mention of Howard Stark ever would.

"That's why Peter was so important to you..." Damian whispered, clicking all the puzzle pieces into place. "The kid has no father so you were hoping to fill that spot- to be the man your dad never could be."

"Key word was," Tony snapped, nodding. "Yes. That *was* the intention. Before our massive blow out. Might I remind you he let you sink a knife into my arm and I let you paper cut him until he was practically dripping red."

"What was your fight about?" Damian asked innocently.

Tony laughed, "What are you now, my counselor? I feel sorry for the kid. He threatened you thinking you were gonna be a big bad wolf and torture me, but no, you wanted a cup of tea and some cookies and we're talking about our feelings."

"I'm just warming up," Damian assured him.

"Good," Tony nodded, motioning to the knife that was on the table to his left- yes he had seen it, studied it, and knew every single tool on that wood the minute he sat down. "Because if you don't use all of that hardware, I want my money back."

Damian started to smile and he leaned forward and patted Tony's knee. "You know what I've noticed? Your...quips, are dry when Peter's in the room, like you're distracted, or preoccupied. But when it's just me, you turn into a spitting image of Chandler Bing."

"You watch Friends," Tony grinned.

Damian ignores him and leans forward, resting his elbows on his thighs, settling down before spreading his hands and asking curiously, "Why is that?"

"How many sides does a circle have?" Tony asked back, before stuttering, "Sorry, I thought we were asking stupid questions."

"There's no such thing as a stupid question, Tony," Damian reminds him with a wink.

Tony nods, "Of course not. There's only stupid people who ask questions," Tony said in agreement. "Although, I'm glad you're closely documenting my humor levels. That's honoring."

"Don't flatter yourself," Damian scoffs.

"I do, everyday," Tony says back, his eyebrow lifting in a cocky fashion. After a second of silence, Tony sighed, "Like Peter said, take a minute, step out into the hallway and come back with that witty retort. Then we'll talk. I'll wait, I swear."

"What's the code to the security system?" Damian asked.

Tony laughed out loud, shaking his head in confusion, "Do you know *nothing* about interrogation? We were getting somewhere in the beginning, going back and forth, exploiting each other, hitting where it hurts. It was good, I actually gained a sliver of twisted respect for you. Then you slowly started losing it towards the middle, some rough dialogue there, saved by a few sarcastic remarks on my part," Tony admitted, before looking up with a flat out grin due to the humor in all this, "and then you hit me with *that*? I didn't punch ya that hard, did I?"

"The number one thing you hate about me, Stark, is that I keep you on your toes. I'm unpredictable, and you hate that," Damian shrugs. "Because you read people, you exploit people for a living, you shoot sarcastic remarks like they're candy, but the one thing you hate...is when you don't have stable footing. If I keep changing up the chess board, I keep you off guard," Damian spread his hands triumphantly. "I have the upper hand."

"Ooh, you taking control is making me all tingly," Tony drawled.

Damian smirked and looked down for a second before repeating his question like it was his lifeline, "So what's the passcode to the security system?"

"So, let me get this straight. Your idea of having control is...you could just stab me, sporadically, for the sole purpose of keeping me on my toes," Tony inferred.

Damian considered it and nodded, making a face, "I just might."

"Will it be sporadic if I'm waiting for it to come though? Because you just told me what you planned to do," Tony frowned.

"I really hate you," Damian laughed, a flare of absolute hate in his eyes.

Tony nodded slowly and smiled, "I hate you too. Now cut the crap. Let's get on with it. Make Peter almost choking the life out of you worth it, or do you want to admit that he actually scared you so you don't want to even scratch me."

Damian snarled and frowned, his gaze darkening. That was his weakness- being called weak. His hands curled into fists, "That's not what this-"

Tony tossed his head over to the table and settled back in the chair, "Prove it."

Peter flexed his wrists, standing in the corner of the room. With two walls to his back, the only danger would be head on, so he could see it coming. Images of the people that he had put in jail flashed across his mind as he tried to figure out who he would be facing. Which person from his past hated him the most? A lot of them. Too many.

He's still feeling a little dizzy, but at least he can stand up straight. His hands are free, which is a nice touch, but Peter doesn't have his web shooters. It wasn't like he was going to get them back either. He had to fend for himself.

After a couple more minutes of waiting he sighs and calls out, "What's the point in me being kept in suspense? Is there a reason or is my date just late?"

The speaker in the corner crackles and someone, not Damian, says, "*He'll be here shortly.*"

"God?" Peter drawls in mock awe, looking around the room. "What's your name?"

"Does it matter?"

"Unless you want me to start singing an AC/DC song in boredom, I suggest you entertain me in a quick game of Twenty Questions. So what's your name?" Peter asked again, sighing in annoyance.

There's a pause and then, *"Richard."*

"Dick," Peter simplified with a nod. "I'm gonna call you Dick." No answer. "So Dick, can you fill me in on this meet and greet thing? Can't do any harm to know what I'm up against."

"Each guest has 30 minutes."

Peter raises his eyebrow. Each one. "Do I get like a water break after each session or..."

"That depends on Damian."

Peter frowned, "Meaning?"

"If he gets bored with Tony," Dick said, as if he was taunting Peter.

Peter looked down and smiled, "You know what, Dick, after I kill Damian, you're next on my list."

"I'm flattered, really," the man said.

Peter clasped his hands and looked around, "Ok, they've officially passed 'fashionably late', it's just plain rude now. Is it gonna be like a huge family reunion, 50 at once or is Damian spreading it out like the dramatic wuss he is?"

"Only two are coming today. And it looks like one is here."

Peter turned to the door and it was opened. He steeled himself, narrowing his eyes to peer through the shadows.

"Hey, Pedro."

Peter's face fell in an instant. Chills ran down his back and the lights turned on, Peter blinking harshly. Adrian Toomes walked in, with his leather jacket and jeans, hands in his pockets. Peter stayed silent, watching as the man, with aged eyes that had bags underneath, walked across the room and curled his fingers around the top of the chair. He started dragging it over and Peter flinched at the harsh sound of metal scraping across the floor. He pulled it across from Peter and sat down in it, clasping his hands.

"How you been, Pete?" Adrian asked.

Peter was shaking. Out of all the people he had fought, why did it have to be Toomes? The man was...a man. There was nothing wrong with him, no messed up DNA, no tragic accident. He had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and had made a decision to help his family- a family with a daughter who Peter had dated for a total of...a couple days, whom he ditched at the homecoming. Liz didn't deserve that, not after he had been crushing on her for weeks, months even.

With Adrian Toomes came the Washington Monument, when Peter had truly felt like a hero, crashing through the window after flipping over a helicopter that had loaded guns pointed at him, saving his friends, and managing to keep it all a secret while his school won the Decathlon. Tony had even complimented him on it. That was the first day he indirectly told Peter he thought of him

as a son. He still remembered what he said.

"My dad never really gave me a lot of support and I'm just trying to break the cycle of shame."

And then he took the suit. They had gotten over that. That wasn't the worst part; he and Tony always fixed their fights.

Because then...Peter had taken Liz to the homecoming and had that awful car ride, more scared than he had ever been, that he might ruin this girl's life because her father was...her father. He hadn't expected that as he opened the door to his date's house, the eyes of his enemy staring back at him as Peter looked on in shock and terror.

Watching that traffic light change from red to green as the idea clicked in Toomes' mind that the boy sitting next to his daughter was Spiderman. Peter felt like his identity was revealed for the first time that day- his world crashing down on him, everything hanging on a ripping piece of thin thread. The one thing he relied on to keep him strong was stripped away in less than a second and for the first time in a long time, he felt vulnerable. Just the feeling of Adrian's gaze boring into his soul through the mirror in the car, and Liz leaving the car leaving him alone- Peter shuddered at the memory. He had never been more scared.

It was silly. They were in a public place, and the man pulled a gun on him. Peter knew he wouldn't pull the trigger but somehow he still started to tremble, his eyes glued on the seat where the man was resting his arm, knowing he was threatening him as he spoke in a calm voice and commanded Peter to answer him with the correct responses. And Peter did. He didn't even hesitate. He told Ned to track his phone, acting like he dropped it there on purpose, when in reality, it slipped out of Peter's hand because it was shaking so hard and he had completely forgotten about it.

He was forced to *thank* the man, for saving his life- meaning that he wouldn't put a bullet in Peter's head while he sat in the back seat. And then Peter was practically walked at gunpoint into the school, everything on the line if he did the right thing.

Peter did the right thing. And everything went to hell. Toomes actually tried to recruit him, stalling yes, but also getting under Peter's skin. He was the first person to do that. And he was the first person to drop a building on Peter as well.

Peter never really gets nightmares. Okay, that wasn't true, he does all the time, but they usually aren't that bad. They don't have him waking up screaming, his legs and arms twisted in sweat soaked sheets, shivering and looking around, trying to convince himself he was home. Those were the bad ones. The bad ones were when he felt himself trapped under that building Toomes had dropped on him, unable to breathe, water pouring down from his mask, his arms and legs pinned. Peter had never been afraid of tight spaces, but not being able to move while being crushed by tons of rock sparked his fear of claustrophobia. He hadn't really told anyone, not even Tony, although he was pretty sure the man knew.

Being under that building shocked Peter into reality, made him question himself and what he was capable of. He cried out for help, the rocks pressing harder against his back as he struggled. Yes, he had gotten out, but then there was the plane, Peter doing his best to snap himself out of panic attacks and flashbacks of being under that building every two seconds, using humor and an adrenaline rush to keep himself focused.

Yet still, Toomes had beat the crap out of him. He could have killed him if he wanted to. Peter remembered being slammed into the ground, the talons digging into his chest as his head snapped back and he screamed in pain. He remembered the massive metal fist colliding with his jaw more times than he could count and the foot in his back that sent him flying with a loud thud into the

sand.

Peter remembered being raised by the hood on his sweatshirt, barely able to breathe, his face a bloody mess wishing this could all just be over. Take the shot, he was thinking, kill me. But he hadn't. Peter had still saved him, and in the end, won. But had he really? Out of all the enemies he had, all the horrible people he fought, Toomes was the worst. That man represented a turning point in Peter's life, and opened the deepest darkest parts of Peter's memory that still made him shift his weight from foot to foot with unease.

With Adrian Toomes came all of that.

And now the man was staring at him, because he had just asked him a question.

Peter licked his lips and stuttered, "Better than you, I'm guessing."

Adrian smirked, his lip curling and he made a face, "True."

"How was prison?" Peter asked, trying to keep up his act.

The man shrugged, scratching the back of his head. "Solitary every day, except for the people who slipped chow under my door. It gets boring after a while. I can only sing Led Zeplin so many times before I get bored."

"Sounds fun," Peter winced, leaning against the wall and crossing his arms because his hands were shaking and he didn't want Toomes to know.

The man paused and then asked quietly, "Have you heard from Liz?"

Peter swallowed and shook his head, "No."

Toomes nodded thoughtfully, biting his cheek and he looked up, "How'd you get yourself into this mess?"

"Trouble seems to find me if you don't remember," Peter snapped.

The man chuckled lightly and nodded, "This is true. You don't look too good, Pete." Peter looked at the ground self consciously. "I mean underneath all the cuts and bruises I can kinda see the same boy that put me away. That saved my life. I've been meaning to ask, did it make you feel good?"

Peter glared at him and didn't answer. Instead he said, "Who did you tell in there? In the Raft? You knew my name, so who did you tell?"

"No one," Toomes said firmly.

"Bull-" Peter hissed.

"No one," Adrian repeated, crossing his arms. "Believe me or not, I don't really care. Don't get me wrong, people asked, I just didn't bite. You had saved my life Peter, I thought I could do you that courtesy at least."

"Well you don't have a gun on me this time, so you're not getting a thank you," Peter snarled.

Toomes smiled, "I really rattled you that day. You still have nightmares, don't you?"

"Shut up," Peter scoffed, pushing himself off the wall so he could walk along the edge of the room. "So why you? Why'd you pay the big bucks to be first in line? And how'd you get the

money?"

"I have connections- people owed me favors from my time before, and as you know, I can be pretty persuasive," Adrian winked, shifting in his seat and crossing his legs, fixing his coat. "I asked to be first because I knew I could catch you off guard, shake you to your core, that kinda thing. I was always good at that, wasn't I? From the minute I opened that door. So I thought hey, why not have you go all the way back to the beginning? Out of everyone you've fought, I'm the one person who's just a human. But we have a history," Adrian smiled. "Don't we?"

"Don't flatter yourself," Peter snarled, looking back at him.

"It was a good choice though, and it's good to see you again kid, really," Adrian nodded, before tossing his head up to the speaker. "They think they've accomplished the impossible, kidnapping you. You didn't tell them about me dropping a building on you, did you? Or when you locked yourself in a deep storage vault truck when we fought? What they've done here isn't special, they just slapped a name and a price on it. But by the looks of you, you haven't really given them anything."

"Wow, you can tell all of that by the look in my eyes?" Peter drawled.

"Body language, Peter," the man winked, shrugging. "I've had a lot of time to think. About you. About my wife. About Liz. But I knew, if I ever got out, I wanted to see you first. I admire you, kid. Your grit. Your drive. Your persistence to stick your head exactly where it shouldn't be. I'm glad I got to see you again."

"You've got thirty-five minutes left," Peter said, crossing his arms. "Are we gonna keep reminiscing about old times?"

"What, you want me to throw a punch?" Adrian asked in shock.

"Rather that and then what's happening right now," Peter scoffed.

Toomes stands up with a sigh and Peter instinctively backs up. The man smiles, "You still that afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of you," Peter said furiously.

The man puts his hands up in surrender and walks forward, Peter moving backward to keep his distance. "There was a TV, barely visible from my cell that one of the guards liked to watch for news. And every so often, you were on there, fearlessly telling off Lizards and Scorpions, and Rhinos, and Electricity people," he waved his hand. "And I sat there, wondering if something happened, because that Spiderman was very different than the one who sat in the back of my car and wouldn't meet my eyes."

"Well Spiderman is different than Peter Parker," Peter scoffed, still moving away.

"Clearly," Adrian motioned. "You haven't even let me get close. Are you scared?"

"No," Peter said instantly.

"You were when I figured it out, and when I pulled the gun on you, when I trapped you under that building unable to move, and when I almost killed you that night on the beach," he taunted, his eyes cold, his tone serious. "I've been waiting for this moment, Peter. For months."

Peter scrambled back some more until the man's voice rang out, "Stop walking, Pete."

Peter froze. Every muscle in his body locked and he froze. He couldn't bring himself to take another step even though he knew he could. Adrian approached him and Peter was shaking as the man reached out. Toomes straightened Peter's shirt, uncurling the sleeve that had been folded the wrong way. Peter flinched at his touch and glared at him.

"You got taller," Adrian admitted.

"Or you got shorter," Peter countered. "What do you want? A hug? We make up and go our separate ways."

"I told you there was nothing I wouldn't do for my family, Pete. It's the most important thing to me, you know that. You saw that, did you not?" Toomes asked.

No, Peter wanted to say. I saw you kick your family to the curb and not give a crap about what they would say if they knew what you were doing behind their back. But instead he licked his lips and made out, "Yes."

"And you saved my daughter once, I thanked you for that. But then you stripped them away from me. Liz...hates me now. I saw her once before she left for Oregon, and she wouldn't even look at me. You ruined my relationship with my daughter, with my wife-" he snarled, reaching forward and grabbing Peter's collar, pushing him back until they hit the wall.

Peter shifted in his grip and shook his head, "You did that yourself."

"I will do anything to protect my family," he hissed. "Or Avenge them. And you took them away from me, Pete. So you're gonna take every hit I throw, because you know you deserve it." Adrian tightened his grip, Peter shifting uncomfortably. "Deny it if you want, go ahead."

Peter stayed silent, his back digging into the wall, his adam's apple bobbing ever so slightly as he sucked in a breath. "Can you still hit me hard without your suit, Toomes?"

Adrian curled his fist and gave him a smile. "I guess you'll be the judge of that, Pete."

The hit was thrown and Peter went sprawling, hitting the ground hard with a stinging jaw. The man approached him and Peter stayed where he was, every muscle in his body screaming for him to fight back but he couldn't because...the man was right. Peter was supposed to be a hero, to save people. He had ruined Liz' life, everything she had worked for. How many others-

A heel of a boot connected with his head and Peter slammed into the ground again with a groan. Adrian was on him in an instant, a knee pressed in the small of his back, hand gripping his hair as the man raised his head.

"How was that, Pete?"

"I can tell-" Peter said weakly. "That you really wanted to do that." That was the best resort he could think of, because another thing just occurred to him. The man had called him Pete countless times since he got here, each sending a chill down his spine that rocked his core.

And Peter, as scared as he was, didn't even correct him. That hurt more than the next hit thrown by the man he had stripped his family from and put behind bars.

YEEEEEEEEEEEEET

I'm hyper. Soooooooooo that's a rip. Avengers are onto them so they've obv coming....Tony is stuck with Damian for a bit, and Peter is having some reunions with people who I wouldn't call friends. More of Toomes next chapter but dangggg that's a lot to unpack so have fun with that. Please tell me whatcha thought, drop a comment, I love hearing from you guys <3 andddd stay tuned! Next chaoter ASAP, def in the nest 4-5 days. SO until then, stay on the edge of your seat and stay tuned! Enjoy summer!!! Thank you so much for reading!
I love you all 3000 <3

Hope is a Tricky Word

Chapter Notes

Heyyyooo lovely readers!!! :)

Thank you so much for your continuous support, you guys rock, I'm serious. Your comments are making my days and my weeks and ahhh just thank you so so much.

The response to each chapter has blown me away <3

This chapter muhahahahaha oh boy we've got a lot to unravel. The Avengers ladies and gentlemen are closing in, Peter and Tony pull off some fabulous stunts with a few intense scenes and heat of the moment confessions that are just so off the cuff it's crazy how these boys communicate. I mean you can't make them lovey dovey because these boys hold grudges like nobody's business so y not go full drill sergeant?

Sit back, i would say relax but were about to dive into the climax so that's not really possible, but yes, do enjoy please, thank you all for reading <3 And happy late July 4th! Hope you all are doing well and enjoying summer!! :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Blood splattered the floor, dark crimson red. Peter was on his hands and knees, the red sticky liquid dripping from his lip and sliding down his chin. The taste in his mouth made his stomach churn and Peter could barely breathe from the hits he had taken to his ribs. It was no doubt he had a black eye and a busted lip, covered in bruises as well.

"Your knuckles..." he wheezed, his palms grasping the hard ground, bangs falling in front of his eyes as he rasped out the question. "They bloody yet?"

"Just about," Toomes snarled, slamming his fist into Peter's jaw when he dared glance up. Peter felt his arms buckle and he hit the ground with a groan. Keep it together, Pete. Get back to Tony. He was alone with Damian, which was worse.

"What...would...Liz...say," Peter gasped out, his hand coming away bloody as he ran it under his nose. The bruise on his jaw stung and Toomes straightened, flexing his fingers.

The man cocked his head as he cracked his knuckles, "About what? Beating up her homecoming date?"

"It's like you don't even care about her," Peter spat.

The man spun, his eyes flashing with pure fire and he yelled, "Everything I did, all of it! Was for her!"

"Pity she won't know that," Peter said, shoving himself backward along the floor. "What, you think you're gonna walk right up, ring the doorbell, say hey sweetie I'm home, and walk in like nothing happened? You broke out of the Raft, and everyone knows it. You thought your life in prison was bad, you can't image what's waiting for you now."

Adrian glared at him and surged forward, crossing the room in a stride. His hand gripped Peter's shirt and he lifted him effortlessly. Peter clutched at the man's arm as he was forcefully held up. "Is that supposed to intimidate me?" Toomes asked with the cock of his head.

"Take it as you will," Peter said with a grin. "You're not one to be easily scared though."

"Neither are you," Toomes admitted. "At least I thought. I guess I was wrong."

Peter tightened his grip on the man's wrist that was clenching his shirt and struggled weakly, whispering, "What's that supposed to mean?" He had seen Toomes' foot move forward and Peter had to force himself not to react as it knocked his feet out from under him. Toomes flipped him and slammed him into the ground, digging a knee into his back which sent chills up his spine and made his legs kick on their own accord.

But that wasn't the real pain. The pain came from his arm, which Adrian *hadn't* let go of when he flipped him- the muscle pulling and stretching as it was twisted, the bone tightening as it threatened to shatter. As Peter hit the ground he heard an audible crack and fire spread through his shoulder, overloading his senses. Everything became sharper and Peter's breath was suddenly sucked from his lungs. His ears started to ring and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move his fingers.

Adrian had just broken his arm, Peter realized. He was shocked. He was in pure shock of how quickly and effortlessly that happened.

Peter opened his mouth to scream in pain, because *God*, it did hurt, but he couldn't. What the hell just happened?

"Wups," Toomes hissed. "Sorry about that. I hope I didn't just break the rules. The only thing I heard was no killing you, which was a shame."

Peter let out a choked cry as the man's thumb dug into his shoulder, right near the crack, causing his body to shudder. He grit his teeth and squirmed as Toomes pinned him and squeezed his eyes shut but no- shutting his eyes...that was worse. Stick with it, Peter. A little longer. Get him completely off guard, then make your move. You need to get to Tony.

"You know I left you there to rot, never thought you would get out..." the man admitted, snarling in his ear.

Peter was shaking, blinking harshly to rid himself of the flashbacks he was seeing in front of him. Toomes' knee was starting to feel more and more like that sharp rock that dug mercilessly into the small of his back, and the pain in his arm was from that odd angle he had wrenched it in, twisting it behind him to slowly push himself up off the ground.

But what if he hadn't gotten out? What if he had been stuck down there, crushed, pinned, unable to move- his heartbeat getting faster and faster, his head pounding. He screamed himself hoarse, his voice cracking with genuine fear that Peter had never felt. Sweat, water, and tears ran down his face and pooled at the bottom where he dropped his mask.

What if- stop it. Tony. Come on, Peter.

"How long were you stuck down there, Pete?" Toomes asked, pressing harder on his broken arm, Peter flinching in pain and steeling himself as pain traveled down his shoulder, his fingers twitching. Peter cried out, shoving his chin to the floor and trying to even his breathing. There was suddenly a grip on his hair and his head was pulled up against his will.

"How. Long?" Toomes repeated quietly.

Peter was shaking and he cried out the truth, "Six minutes." How did he know? He counted every second.

Six minutes of being trapped. Of thinking there was no way out. Of feeling sharp rocks digging into his calves whenever he moved, his back twisted at a weird angle, his chest compressed which didn't help his hyperventilation. He had never been claustrophobic, and he never thought he would be, until that moment.

Peter felt Toomes' knee dig harder into his back, the hand on his arm pressing on the break suddenly jolted harder against the bone. Peter winced at both of those, but did not let out a scream. The man was talking now, but Peter couldn't hear him. Instead, he heard another voice.

"You fight, you understand me?" Tony swore silently, glaring at him with firmness, his glance flickering to Peter's freed hands.

Peter stared at him because there was a lot of meaning in that sentence. Tony couldn't say what he wanted to out loud, but somehow Peter understood every last one that Tony voiced.

You fight, because I can't lose you again.

I'm proud of you.

You remember what I taught you, understand?

"But you," Toomes spat, letting Peter's head drop as he shoved himself off of him, leaving Peter panting on the ground. "You haven't learned anything. You *pathetic* kid, thinking you can take my family from me, my job, my friends, my life!" he yelled.

Peter rolled onto his side with a groan, squeezing his eyes shut until they were open just a small bit. Damian had Tony. Alone. That was motivation enough. And so Peter writhed in pain, lowering his legs a small bit just to leave his stomach exposed, gasping for air that wouldn't suck through his crushed ribs. Adrian walked over and Peter whimpered, scrambling back and crying, "Stop- please-"

"Begging now, Peter? It's too late for that," Toomes hissed as he circled him, crouching by his side. "You could have been great. I admired you. I really did. And I didn't want to put you through any of that." He ran a hand roughly through his hair, shaking his head and exclaiming, (rather truthfully, Peter might add), "I gave you an out, Pete!"

"And you expected me to take it? So what...you could supply the weapons that would murder thousands of people?" Peter demanded weakly, his voice shaking as he cradled his arm, spitting blood out of his mouth as he coughed.

"It wouldn't be our problem, Pete. I explained this. They don't care about us," Toomes hissed.

Peter grips the ground in an attempt to crawl backward, before a foot presses down on his bad arm and Peter freezes, crying out as Adrian digs his heel in. Peter yelps, gritting his teeth as he feels his bone crack even more underneath the man's foot. "You had grit," Toomes said, looking down on him sadly. "You had drive. You were a good kid, you just got mixed up in the bad. And I am sorry," he said quietly, easing his shoe off of Peter's arm.

Peter clutched his broken arm against his chest, letting out a sob of relief. "Yeah," he rasped weakly. "You're sorry."

Toomes sighed and checked his watch, "Lucky for you. I've got twenty five minutes left."

Peter's heartbeat sped up. Come on, Peter. "Make it count," he said weakly, letting fear shine through his eyes. He curled his arm to his chest, still keeping his stomach exposed, his hands

visibly shaking to Toomes. The man brought his foot back.

Peter narrowed his eyes, sucking in a breath and tensing. Adrian shoved his heel forward, headed for the exact spot Peter was waiting for him to plant it- his exposed ribs.

You remember what I taught you, understand?

Peter steadied his breathing, time moving slower as he forced himself to ignore the pain and concentrate. He twisted as the man planted his kick, slamming his good palm into the foot that came for his chest before it could hit him. He yanked Adrian's ankle harshly and spun on the ground, kicking Toomes straight in the knee. Then he pushed off the floor with his bad arm, crying out but still standing after a slight period of staggering. He swung with his good arm, catching Adrian across the jaw, before kicking him hard in the chest.

Toomes hit the wall and Peter put up his fist, adrenaline surging through him.

The man pushed himself up, breathing hard. Adrian grinned, "Well I didn't expect that."

"That's the point," Peter snarled, moving forward slightly.

"But are you bluffing?" the man taunted, taking a step as well.

"I guess you'll have to find out," Peter said, his eyes flashing.

Adrian smiled, waving his hand, "Nice trick."

Peter smirked back, "Thanks."

The man's fist curled at his side and Peter tensed. Adrian lunged and Peter sidestepped, tossing his good shoulder into the man's chest, throwing him to the side. Peter then slammed his heel into Toomes' already bad knee. Adrian stayed on his feet and swung and Peter ducked, throwing his own uppercut into the man's jaw. Toomes jabbed him the stomach but Peter tightened his muscles so it didn't hurt. Then he brought his elbow back, planting it right across the man's face.

They twisted out of each other's grasps and Toomes launched a kick that Peter shoved away before catching the next one, twisting Adrian's foot. The man grasped at empty air and then caught his wrist and Peter yanked it out of his grasp, shoving a palm against his jaw. Toomes reeled and Peter attempted to swing before he felt a hand squeeze his bad shoulder. Peter cried out in pain, his punch falling before it could make contact so he could grip his enemy's hand. Adrian staggered back with him as Peter pulled away, caught in a lock of limbs towards the center of the room.

"It doesn't matter what you say or do, Peter. I've already won," Toomes seethes. "You waking up in cold sweats, panic attacks, nightmares?"

"Shut up," Peter groaned, his hand shaking as he twisted the man's wrist, trying to wrench him off.

Adrian reached with his other hand, grabbing Peter around the throat, "I've ruined your life, and I'm the only one who can get under your skin. That's another reason why I was first, you know. They needed someone who could deal some damage that you would take, willingly. I'd knock you down a peg before the fun started. I may not leave as many bruises as the other guys, but I hit harder."

Toomes pressed harder, tightening his grip and digging into his broken arm. Peter pushed back, gritting his teeth in pain and choking out, "You're wrong."

"You can never beat me, Pete," he snarled, his hand tightening. "Not me."

Peter stepped back again and his foot hit something. In one swift and desperate move he let go of the hand around his throat and reached behind him, gripping the chair's back with white knuckles. His hand clenched around it and he swung, twisting his body and slamming his good arm down on Toomes' hand holding his shoulder. It hit Toomes straight in the head with a nauseating clang and the man slumped to the ground, unconscious, his hands slipping off Peter instantly.

Peter dropped the chair in triumph and exhaustion, breathing hard as he rubbed his throat and clutched his broken arm. Adrian was twitching on the ground in front of him, his eyes rolled up in the back of his head, blood dripping down the side of his face. Peter stumbled back and collapsed against the opposite wall, arm cradled to his chest.

"For the record...Tony taught me that 'trick'," Peter huffed, his head falling against the wall. "And I was always able to beat you," he murmured as his eyes slipped shut.

Tony growled in pain, gritting his teeth as Damian punched him hard in the shoulder he had broken or dislocated or whatever. A bulls-eye of torture for the man causing him pain. He barely had time to register that fire before he got smacked across the face, his lip busting again.

"Does this make you feel good?" Tony asked, spitting out blood to the side. "Did you wake up and somehow look at yourself in the mirror, and feel content with your life?"

"I could ask you the same question," Damian grinned, wiping the knife on Tony's jeans. "I'd prefer if we stayed on the same subject. I asked a question, are you ready to answer it?"

"See now we're getting somewhere," Tony cocked his head. "I just have a quick one to ask before I consider answering yours. What do you plan on doing with the information I may or may not decide to give you? Please tell me it's not the common 'taking over the world' skit, because that got old a long time ago."

"I don't have to tell you anything," Damian hissed, flipping the knife in his hand and slamming the hilt across Tony's jaw.

Tony's head snapped back and he groaned, taking a deep breath. "So then I guess we're back to silence."

"I was never good at the quiet game," Damian admitted, balancing the tip of the knife on Tony's thigh and gently pressing down until he got a wince, his lips slowly curling at the reaction.

Tony made a face and scoffed, "Clearly. Psychopath."

"Oh, I'm hurt," Damian pouted his lower lip, simultaneously sliding the knife in deeper and moving the tip from side to side, watching as Tony desperately tried to keep a straight face, his lips white as he set his jaw.

"I bet your parents made you play the quiet game, like in the car? Road trips?" Tony snarled. "They didn't really care about you, did they?"

"Nah, they were just fighting in the front seat. I learned to block them out," Damian shrugged. "At least all my memories involving cars ended with everyone getting where they needed to go in one piece."

"Oh, harsh," Tony whistled, controlling a wince. "That hurt my ego tremendously, can you tell?"

"No, not yet," Damian admitted, digging the knife in harder, Tony's leg jerking as he let out a cry of pain.

"You know you don't have much time, right?" Tony made out desperately. Expression darkening into something that might have been a flicker of fear, Damian pressed harder and the tip sank into Tony's skin, his thigh muscle clenching as he arched his back, shifting in his chair and yanking on his bonds out of instinct. Amazingly, Tony kept his voice level. "I take that's a yes."

"I have all the time in the world, Stark," Damian said slowly and confidently.

Tony shrugged, "I really don't think you do, and you know it. The Avengers should be closing in right about now. And you're gonna end up in a cell, or dead," he added carelessly, "with nothing-gaining nothing. You should have covered up your tracks better, and left me where I was."

Damian sank the knife deeper and Tony let out a yell through gritted teeth, blood soaking his leg in a growing pool that stained the fabric. Then, without warning, the man yanked the knife out, Tony jolting in the chair, breathing hard.

"Why'd you stop? Get a little too gory for you?" Tony taunted. The man set the knife on the ground and went over to the table, grabbing a hammer.

"Say you're right, and the Avengers are coming..." he said thoughtfully, sauntering back over. "Say I do die," he admitted, spinning the hammer around through his fingers. "It's a possibility, yes. I'm not gonna kill you, Tony. But what would two broken hands do to you?"

Tony straightened, gulping slightly. Damian grinned at his reaction and shrugged, "A mechanic who can't fix things? That would mess you up, and, if I do say so myself, be a nice memory of me for you to cherish."

Inside, Tony was screaming, itching to get out of the chair because this was his nightmare, Damian knew that. Not being able to use his hands, to fix things, to hold a wrench and spin it on his thumb-his finger started tingling and he clenched his hand into a fist as the man neared.

"So I want you to remember this," Damian said softly, untying one of Tony's hands and re-knotting the rope so that his elbow and hand were flat against the arm of the chair. Tony struggled but the bonds held fast. His hand was shaking against the chair and Damian rubbed the spot with the top of the hammer. "Right there." He dug it in between Tony's knuckles and Tony flinched harshly, breathing hard through his nose, panic rising in his closing chest.

"Ready?" Damian winked, tapping his hand once with the tool. Tony jumped.

No. He clenched the arm of the chair, desperately trying to move his wrist, but he couldn't. Damian raised the hammer and Tony sucked in a breath, pure fear running down his spine as he imagined what it would feel like to have every bone shatter in his hand, unable to move his fingers-

Then the door opened. And in that moment, Tony wished he could have brought the hammer down if he didn't have to see what was in front of him.

"Pete-" he choked.

Damian lowered the hammer and it dropped to the ground, but Tony barely noticed, even though his eyes had been glued to the tool since the moment Damian picked it up.

The kid was being held through the open doorway by two men, each taking hold of an arm. Peter was covered in blood, and probably sporting some cracked ribs as well, his head slumped against

his chest, feet dragging.

"Peter! How nice of you to join us!" Damian smiled, signaling the man to drop the kid. They shoved him into the room and Peter didn't even stop his fall. He hit the ground and it was then that Tony noticed his arm. Peter instinctively cradled it to his chest, even nearly unconscious, and it was bent slightly the wrong way, his fingers limp. The kid coughed up blood and took a raspy gasp, his eyes opening.

Damian crouched by his side and Tony jerked in his bonds with a curse.

"Wanna tell me what happened, Peter?" Damian asked quietly.

"Sure," the kid groaned, desperately trying to stay conscious, a few seconds of precious energy left; it was already being rapidly drained. "Toomes showed up. We had a nice reunion. Then I knocked him out with a chair."

Damian straightened in shock, getting to his feet and exclaiming, "You what?"

"Well he was cocky, so I played off of it. Made him think I was weak, and then I wiped the floor with him. These guys were gonna tell you but they thought you would be mad," Peter drawled, spitting out blood and rolling onto his side with a horrible flinch.

Damian looked to the left at the two men who had brought Peter in, and sure enough they were standing there awkwardly. "Is it true?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"He's being treated in our bed bay sir, minor concussion, a broken rib and just some other minor injuries," one of them mumbled.

"Wups," Peter giggled, wincing in pain.

Tony gave him a proud smile, letting out a laugh. Peter caught his eye and smirked.

"I'm glad you think this is funny," Damian snarled, and before Tony could even let out a yell, he kicked Peter harshly in the ribs. The kid groaned and curled up with a violent cough, his eyes screwed up in pain.

"Damian, I swear to God-" Tony choked out.

"What, what you gonna do?" Damian drawled. "Hit me with an insult, go for it, that will definitely make me stop." He brought his foot back again, rage sparking in his eyes and Peter braced with a small and strangled whimper.

A whimper.

Time stopped for Tony.

He flinched harder than he ever had, his fists balling.

His face went slack and his chest heated up.

Pure rage coursed through him.

The kid had been through enough, he had been tortured, sleep deprived, starved, and had just been forced to let his old enemy beat him until he was barely conscious, because it had been the only way he could have won. The kid was exhausted, and in pain, and just...done. And Damian was going to plant a kick to his already broken ribs, and make the kid *whimper*. And there was no way

in hell Tony was going to let that happen, it didn't matter what it cost him. In a sudden surge of protectiveness, Tony thought, *screw it*.

"Get the hell away from him." There was a moment of silence as Damians gaze flicked towards him and then he was drawn to what he saw in Tony Starks eyes. The mans gaze was fierce and deadly serious. "Kick him one more time and I swear to you I will put your head through a wall and make sure you never breath again. I will kill you slowly and I will enjoy it, so back the hell away from him right now, do you understand me, you pathetic, sick, lunatic," Tony snarled, and something in his voice made the man turn around. Tony was breathing hard, his fists clenched, his gaze on Peter in panic and fear. It was the first time he had let those feelings show, and the expression felt foreign on his face, like a long lost friend who he was seeing again. For three months those emotions had been masked, and now they were back, and Tony had no problem tapping into the absolute firmness and terrifying nature he kept reserved for when someone so much as touched his kid.

And it worked.

Damian stepped forward, narrowing his eyes, cautious though.

Tony met his gaze and they had a silent conversation, their eyes twitching.

Tony allowed himself to be read, Damian greedily gulped in the information.

They went back and forth, Tony taking every step that he took away from Peter, an accomplishment, Damian taking everything admitted in Tony's gaze as such as well.

Damian was eventually the one who came out triumphant.

Both took a breath.

"I knew it," the man muttered in awe, looking at him with a curled lip that could have resembled a smile, except for the twisted reason he was happy. "I knew it," he said again, prompting Tony to respond, wanting to savor this moment of victory.

Tony swallowed and lifted his chin, determined to keep Peter safe and get him out of this one, for now at least. "Save your victory dance," he snapped. "If you have any shred of decency or intelligence, you'll know that the kid can barely breathe, or stay conscious. Good for you," Tony snarled fiercely, "you won, you answered the million dollar question, screw you very much. Now get. My. Kid. Out," Tony swore angrily, not blinking.

Damian considered this and looked back at Peter who was trying to stay conscious, not even aware of the conversation happening in front of him. He was in too much pain and too tired to care or comprehend. And in Damian's twisted mind, it wasn't as fun to torture someone who was out of it- less reactions, and less understanding of pain. So as his wheels turned, Tony stifled a sigh of relief, knowing he would listen.

Damian motioned to the guards and they came in and grabbed Peter by his bad arm. Tony instantly barked, "EASY! I swear to God I will kill you both." He was shaking in anger, his eyes flashing. The guard actually took a step back and shifted his grip to Peter's collar, the other man grabbing the kid's good shoulder to drag him out.

"Tny-" Peter murmured quietly, his feet kicking against the ground as his eyes fluttered open for a brief second, still quite out of it. "Tony-

"I'm ok," Tony lied, giving him a faked smile of assurance. "It's okay."

Peter's gaze fell to the hammer that Damian had dropped and the grin on the man's face. A moment of clarity shone through as Peter's eyes focused and he growled, "Don't-"

The door shut and Damian snickered, looking back at Tony who snapped, "I don't want to hear it."

"I mean, I knew the whole time, I just gave up trying to convince you both- you are really stubborn, I'll give you that," he said, scooping up the hammer and shaking it towards him. "But I'm disappointed. I thought you would have..." he bit his lip, searching for the right word. "broken, for something more..." he waves his hands dramatically. "I was just gonna kick the kid. Like...that wasn't much."

"Sorry to disappoint you?" Tony asked sarcastically.

Damian looked at the door where Peter had been dragged out and scooped up the knife that had been lying on the floor. Absentmindedly, he tapped against his chin, before realizing it was covered in blood. He wiped it off with his sleeve and asked, "Peter doesn't seem to feel the same though, Tony. Have you noticed that? I think this relationship," he winced, leaning forward to whisper to Tony. "Is really one sided."

"Like I said, we have our history. You figure out what happened yet?" Tony asked with a smirk.

Damian nodded slowly, "I think so. You tell me if I'm hot or cold. He got hurt because of you, so you cut him out, pushed him away. Peter never forgave you."

"Warmer," Tony smiled.

Damian shrugged, "But I gave you the reunion you've always wanted- and it didn't work out the way you planned. Deep down there's still some remnants of that codependent, insanely *unhealthy* relationship that you both have, but something's different."

"Hot," Tony forced a smile, despite every bone in his body wanting to portray the opposite. He felt vulnerable, the exact thing that was eating at him- that had been eating at him for the past couple days, was now coming out of his enemy's mouth.

"Peter won't die for you anymore, and you know it. Sure, he threatened me in the hallway, but there's a big difference between being protective of someone and dying for them. Different levels of love that I don't think Peter reciprocates anymore," Damian said, pouting out his lower lip.

"Congratulations. So?" Tony asked, his voice breaking despite him desperately trying to cover it.

Damian grinned and crouched, motioning with the knife that was covered in Tony's blood. "How does that feel? Does it hurt? That the kid you had such a perfect relationship with, now would let you take a shot for him but wouldn't return the favor?"

Tony didn't answer. He looked down and turned his head, a lump in his throat. Damian reached in glee and turned his chin back, Tony snarling and yanking his head out of the man's grip.

Damian chuckled and put up his hands in surrender, "I see. You don't want to talk anymore. Well hey, you don't have to. You can just scream," he shrugged, switching out the knife for the hammer he had placed on the ground a while ago. "My one request is that you yell loud enough so Peter can hear you, now that you've confirmed you guys are the father son duo of the century. Even if the kid won't die for you, I think he'll still like to hear some screams."

"Up yours," Tony hissed.

Damian grinned and pressed his thumb on the middle of Tony's hand. The panic came back in an instant, blood rushing to his head, his heart pounding, ears throbbing as he sucked in a breath, his hand starting to shake. Damian raised the hammer with an expression on his face that would haunt Tony until the day he died. His hand tingled and Tony yanked on his bonds, flexing his fingers that suddenly ached as he imagined the hammer coming down and smashing his bones into pieces, practically sinking down until it hit the arm of the chair- possibly breaking that- oh *God*-

When suddenly Damian's phone rang. The air was heated and it slowly cooled. The man cursed and let the tool drop to his side, digging out his cell.

Tony sank back into his seat and grinned, "Well aren't I just lucky? That's twice now. I think that's considered a sign from above?"

"Shut up," Damian hissed, putting it to his ear after answering. "Hello? Rich, I'm a little busy now- are you-" Damian's face slackened and he nodded, his voice trembling only slightly, "Ok." He hung up the phone with a massive glare.

"You get called to the principal's office?" Tony asked innocently.

"Stay put," Damian snarled, crossing the room and opening the door, slamming it shut behind him.

Tony's eyes fell on the knife on the floor.

"This better be good, Rich," Damian swore, slamming open the door and going over to the chair with a dangerous expression and crossed arms. "I was about to break Tony Stark's hand."

"As you know I have satellites on surveillance for a pretty large radius around us, so we can see if anybody is coming and to pick up incoming signals," the man spluttered.

"Yes, get to the point," Damian sighed.

"Well I got movement," Rich said nervously, his fingers flying across the keyboard and pointing at a dot that was closing in, "It's headed for our location. I can't hack into the source, because there's some sort of jammer- but it gets worse. We've been sent a transmission."

"Did you listen to it?" Damian asked as the communication link opened up on the screen, the play button blinking.

Rich shook his head, "No. No, I was waiting for you."

Damian reached and pressed the play button, lowering his hands to the nearest seat, gripping the back with white knuckles.

"I'll just get straight to the point."

Damian flinched and straightened, grinding his teeth together. He recognized the voice.

This is Steve Rogers and I'm speaking on behalf of all the Avengers with me now. You know who I am, but I don't know who you are, and frankly, I don't care. All I know is you have two friends of mine, and I will either get them back alive, or I will kill you. The entire team of Earth's Greatest Defenders are closing in on your location, and we're closer than you think. You're probably looking at a small dot on your screen, aren't you? Thinking you have time to prepare, to make a

plan, but you don't; we're much closer. Spoiler alert, we have better hackers than you, because Tony Stark is smarter than you. Peter Parker is smarter than you. And they are both, stronger than you."

Bile rose in his throat and he gulped it down, keeping his breathing steady. Why would they call....he thought....if they were coming, why would they alert him-

So we have the element of surprise, we have you surrounded, we have your location, and we are going to make sure that no one leaves before we get there. So why am I calling? Because I want you to be scared, intimidated, fearful, piss your pants terrified."

Damian gulped, his brow furrowing and Rich looked over at him nervously.

I usually like to take prisoners, and have them sent away to pay for what they did, but this time, it's personal. Because you made it personal. So when we get there, there will be no compromise, there will be no negotiation, it will be a bloodbath. We will come for you, and we will kill you."

His hand clenched on the metal of the chair, his knuckles pale white.

"All of your communications out are now blocked and we have SHIELD ready to surround your building. Very few people can piss me off this much, but congratulations sir, you're one of those few people."

CLICK.

The message stopped. Damian stood in silence, his body trembling with anger. Did he actually have SHIELD here? Were all the Avengers on that jet? Were his coms really blocked? Damian should check, but he felt like he would be wasting his time. He had never heard someone so serious, so intent on killing him- well aside when Tony threatened him for touching Peter, but that was a different story. Tony was tied up. Steve Rogers and the Avengers were not. They were killing machines, working outside of the law...with no reason to lie.

Richard swallowed, his hands hovering over the keyboard, "What should I do, sir?"

"I-" Damian was at a loss for words. He stared at the dot, trying to convince himself that the Avengers were that far away, when in reality, they could be in his backyard. "Stay here, set everything on lockdown."

"What are you going to do?" Rich asked.

Damian had known this was a possibility for a while- the Avengers coming. But it had been in the back of his mind- a thought he did not want to admit could happen, because it would ruin everything. He could not beat the Avengers. He knew that; he wasn't stupid. But they were coming for Tony and Peter. So if he was going to go down, mine as well take them down with him. After all, he and Tony had come to the same conclusion: what was drowning in a little more blood?

He smiled slightly and looked at Rich, "I'm going to kill Tony Stark and Peter Parker."

Then he turned on his heel, pushed open the door and left the room. He walked briskly down the hall, ripping the gun from his waist band and letting his hand mold around it comfortably. With a twisted grin on his face like a madman, he turned the corner and slammed his shoulder into the door, bursting in ready to put a bullet between Tony's eyes.

His gaze fell on an overturned chair and cut ropes, the knife gone. Damian's hand curled hard over his pistol and he almost pulled the trigger. Then he spun around in fury, eyes practically glowing

with hate, his chest heating red.

"You're gonna intimidate him?" Natasha drawled, looking over his shoulder in the cockpit. "Smart, Steve."

"We need to buy Tony and Peter time. We need to scare him," Steve insisted. "We can hack into their coms, right? We're close enough?"

"Yes, I can gain access, but not to their security," FRIDAY announced.

Bucky shouldered his gun, "We don't need access to their security. We're barging in."

"Do we know the blueprints of the place?" Wanda asked, rubbing her hands on her knees.

Clint nodded and tossed a 3D screen projection back from his seat at the front. It expanded and Steve stood, pointing to a spot. "Here's where we're gonna make our move. It's the weakest point, and it's the back door. We're literally gonna break through walls."

"We haven't gone code green in a while," Nat called back. "You doing okay, Bruce?"

Bruce pulled off his headphones and nodded slowly, "So far so good."

"The prisoner cells are on the lower level, but who knows if Tony and Peter are actually gonna be there- let's hope they found a way out and are just wandering around arguing," Steve grins, but his smile falters. "Or if they're...in the middle of something."

Everyone looked down and Steve suddenly couldn't speak anymore. He had seen pain on Tony's face before, sometimes he had been the one who caused it- and each time he had hated it. Rhodey patted him on the shoulder and took over for a bit, Steve stepping back against the wall. They had already taken longer to find them than they had hoped, and each second was precious time. Time he had not been willing to waste. Each day was another day Tony was being tortured, Peter was being tortured, no doubt their relationship being picked apart- the perfect target for this sick lunatic who had them.

Steve slumped in a seat, clasping his hands to keep them from shaking. He hated lying to Pepper, to Happy, and he hated answering those calls Ned, telling him that yes they were close, before a sharp pang in his chest told him that that was the same answer he had provided for the past couple times the kid called. This time around the call was different though, he had talked to the kid a couple minutes after they had taken off. Ned was on standby actually, on a different server, because get this, he had blackmailed the Avengers into letting him help by saying he would blab to the police about Tony. Steve knew if he just showed up at his door and gave him a stern look the kid would back off, but he allowed Ned to be on a secure outside link that could not be tracked, an extra set of eyes if anything happened to their tech. But that didn't calm all his fears. He hated knowing May was halfway across the world, secretly being watched with a shield team on her to make sure she wasn't in danger, emailing someone posing as Peter while her nephew was-

Steve took a shaky breath. And Tony...the entire reason the two of them had broken off was because Tony had cared for the kid so much in his own twisted solution. Seeing the kid get hurt because of him, combined with his foul mouth and sass...that was just recipe for pain and torture and things that kept Steve awake the past few nights. He hadn't drank as much coffee as the rest of them- they had to take a couple runs to the store to get more; no one was sleeping- but like he said before, they were all wide awake and alert now. They had been waiting for this.

He, Rhodey, and Nat were the Avengers closest to Tony. For the past couple days, when one broke, the other two stepped in to fill the gap. A strong team that relied on each other to keep the team's spirits hopeful and strong because with Tony...they had no one cracking sarcastic jokes every dang second to keep the moods up, had no crazy insane plans from a guy spiraling in a red and yellow suit, shouting out cuss words and doing what he did best.

It felt empty without Tony, and Steve realized for the first time, how much he impacted the team. He had known he did- of course he knew he did, and he had always recognized Tony a leader of the Avengers aside from himself...but Steve had seen a significant drop in his confidence since Tony was taken, and he now realized it was not only because the man hadn't been sprouting friendly one liners- their brand of friendship, but because Tony gave him confidence. He gave everyone confidence. And Steve had let him spiral for three months without Peter, not trying to fix anything between the kid and his father figure...he now couldn't help but think that this was partly his fault.

So yeah, he wanted to call that man who took his friend and the kid that he and the team and grown to love and protect, and tell him to back off and roll over before Steve shoved his shield down his throat. Realizing his hands were clenched, Rhodey's voice snapped him out of it.

"We find Tony and Peter first, and break everything that stands in our way. We know there are a few Raft prisoners there- deal with it in the moment. I trust you all. As for the guy behind all of this, if you find him...you know what to do. A copy will be uploaded to everyone who has a server and access, and we'll go in teams. That's Vision, Rhodey and Sam."

"Once we're inside I should be able to hack into their system or at least block their access point," Vision said.

Rhodey nodded, "Good. Whatever we can get to shut this place down. Spread out, break everything you can. Nothing should be left standing when we're done. There are three levels to this thing- it's a connection of four warehouses and possibly some underground levels as well."

Steve found his voice, "The objective, which you all know but I'm just going to reiterate for my own sake: get the kid and Tony out of there. We don't pull back until we have them both. Got it?"

Echoes of agreement and nods went like a wave around the jet.

Steve nodded firmly. "Okay."

"How much time we got?" Sam asked, cleaning his gun and reloading it.

"Fifteen," Nat called back.

Steve ran a hand through his hair, "Connect me to them. I'll make it short and sweet."

"And hey, say we've got SHEILD or something, or the place surrounded," Clint yelled back.

Rhodey frowned, "But we don't?"

Steve smirked, "But they don't know that. Good thinking Clint."

"That's what we keep you around for," Nat patted him on the shoulder.

"I'll put this ship down," he warned.

"*Gaining access to their coms now. One moment please,*" FRIDAY said slowly. The screen

blinked and loaded, numbers flashing across it as Tony's tech hacked into the server after getting a solid lock.

Steve nodded, taking a deep breath. Rhodey nudged him and gave him a look. "They have Tony and Peter. Give em' hell."

Steve's glare worsened and when he looked up he saw red. The minute that button started blinking, he started talking, venom dripping through his voice. He was dead serious with everything he said, because the rage that someone- some lunatic could be hurting his best friend and a kid who wasn't even out of high school pained him enough, but this man had messed with his family. His *family*.

No one does that and gets away with it. When Steve ended the call, no one spoke, but pride and agreement shone through their gazes.

"Well put, Steve," Vision nodded at him.

"Thanks, Viz," he smiled weakly, curling his fingers and taking a deep and shaky breath, his chest burning.

He turned to his team who had all been staring at him- even Bruce had taken off his headphones and listened, his eyes narrowed. Steve dared to hope. He dared to hope that they could pull this off and get Tony and Peter out of there before anything went wrong, or before they couldn't be saved. He knew Tony was probably daring to hope they were coming, and he wished he could tell his best friend that he was. Hope was a tricky thing- it could let you down, it had let him down multiple times before...Steve just hoped it didn't. He met all of their gazes and nodded, "Let's get em' back."

Tony snuck down the hallway rubbing his wrists and flexing his hands he thanked God he still had. Cutting the ropes had been tiring work since he went so fast, and his side still ached from tipping the chair over, but it was worth it. He was out now, and he needed to get to the kid. Determination was what kept him going even though Tony could very well slump to the ground in exhaustion. Tony wiped blood from his nose, shouldering the wall as a guard passed before he silently crept forward, limping slightly from the wound in his thigh. Hand clutched over it, blood soaking through his jeans and spilling over his knuckles, Tony avoided the cameras as best he could, knowing he had limited time.

There was a man standing in front of their cell, the keys around his pocket and Tony gripped the hilt of the knife, taking a deep breath and waiting for him to look away. The minute he did, Tony didn't waste a second, lunging forward and looping an arm around the man's neck, slamming the knife hilt into his head to knock him out. Tony lowered him slowly, looking around to make sure no one had seen the take down before he shoved him in the next cell over, slipping the keys off his belt. Tony shut the door behind him and limped to the correct cell, fumbling with the keys and shoving open the door.

Peter was on his side at the very end of the room and Tony ran forward, crossing the floor in seconds. He slid to his knees, setting the knife and keys down, rolling Peter onto his back and slipping a hand beneath his head and an arm around his shoulders, moving him into somewhat of a sitting position as Peter's head fell against his shoulder.

"Kid," Tony hissed urgently, cupping his cheek with his other hand, ignoring the flare of pain from his bad shoulder. "Pete, hey-"

The kid swallowed, his eyes squeezing in pain. He opened his mouth, gasping for air before he

made out in a very strained voice, "Don't call me Pete." Tony's gaze fell and he sucked in a breath as he registered that sentence. It hurt more than getting stabbed, or waterboarded. It was the shock of knowing that the nickname reserved only for him to use was now stripped away.

"Okay," he mumbled sadly. "Okay, I'm sorry-"

"Only Tony gets to call me that," Peter said quietly, his eyes still shut underneath his curly bangs.

Tony's head snapped up and he couldn't resist a smile, tugging Peter closer as a feeling of warmth spread through his chest. "That's right Pete, only me. I need you to wake up, kiddo, I need you with me." Peter's brow knit in concentration and he stirred in Tony's arms, flinching before he sucked in a breath, his eyes blinking open as he coughed. "Atta boy," Tony grinned.

Peter's good arm reached up and gripped Tony's sleeve, gulping down another breath, his gaze fierce and demanding, "What did he do to you?"

"Nothing, kid, I'm fine. Look, we gotta get out of here, okay? He's gonna be back but Steve is close, I'm pretty sure at least."

"Steve?" Peter's eyes lit up with hope. He knew what the kid was thinking. What he was thinking. *Rescue*.

Tony nodded firmly, "Yeah, but we've got to move until he gets here. Damian's gonna be back. He went on a goose chase and is gonna figure out I'm not where I'm supposed to be," he finished urgently.

"I-" Peter stuttered, his gaze unfocused as his head started to nod towards his chest. "Ok- good plan-" then he gripped Tony's shirt and shook his head weakly, slurring, "we're still not good by the way- you don't get to play hero- and think you're in the clear- I'm still mad at you-"

"I know. I know. Pete!" Tony snapped gently, just to get the kid's attention. He lifted Peter's chin lightly to lock eyes with him, the teen's gaze immediately sharpening. Tony nodded and said, "Yell at me later, I promise, I'll listen. But with my arm, I can't carry you so I need you to walk. If I help you, can you walk?" he asked. Peter nodded firmly and Tony was careful of the kid's broken arm. Tony's gaze darkened and he asked, "Toomes?"

Peter nodded weakly and Tony cursed, "He's dead." He looped Peter's good arm over his shoulder and lifted him to his feet, taking a first step and adjusting his weight.

"That's it, easy," Tony muttered in encouragement. The kid winced in unison with Tony and they staggered to the door, Tony kicking it open with his foot as they started down the hallway away from where Damian had stormed off to.

"What...did he do to you-" Peter repeated more firmly, leaning against Tony's side, cradling his broken arm to his chest.

"Talked me to death, almost broke my hand. Key word almost. You got it worse," Tony said dismissively, turning a corner, wondering how many hallways were in this place. "Heard you threatened him? Nice one, Pete," Tony hissed, peeking around the corner before continuing to walk.

Peter gave a weak smile, "Don't flatter yourself. I just wanted my share of payback. You got to punch him."

Tony winced, his bad shoulder flaring as he gripped the knife. He knew he couldn't support the kid

with his fractured arm so he used his good one to hold Peter up because God knows he needed it. His hand was shaking as he held the knife, nearly dropping it every five seconds from the strain on his ripped muscles in his arm but Tony knew if it came down to it, he would be able to swing anything to protect the kid leaning against him as they stumbled down the hallway. Tony sighed, his eyes scanning around the corners, "Yes I did."

"I said what I meant a few seconds ago," Peter muttered as they moved quickly. "We're not-"

Tony scoffed, "You mean you meant what you said?" he corrected, checking behind them to make sure they weren't being followed.

Peter rolled his eyes. Tony's lip curled; he knew Peter had rolled his eyes even though he wasn't looking at that moment. The kid sighed, "Whatever. Look, just cause you're playing hero doesn't mean we're good, you got that?"

Tony looked over at him once he was satisfied no one was behind him, also trying to lessen the sting from those words. "Don't flatter yourself," he quoted the kid, holding back a flinch. He set his jaw and ignored the stinging in his eyes, "I promised I'd get you out of here. The first day, I promised."

"You never said it out loud," Peter grumbled. "You just looked at me and promised."

Tony looked over, "You obviously still got the message, didn't you?" The kid smirked slightly, but through both of their smiles, there was pain and Tony needed to address it. Half talking to himself, he spoke firmly, forcing his voice not to shake. "I promised to get you out, and that's exactly what I'm doing. Then you can yell at me, let out all your true feelings, even throw a punch, I don't care, in fact, I want you to punch me. I know what I did. I know I screwed up- screwed us up. I know you wouldn't die for me, or take a hit for me- and you shouldn't. I don't deserve it. You have every right to be pissed-"

"I would die for you," Peter said quietly, keeping his eyes trained ahead.

Tony stopped in his tracks. He hadn't even meant for that to come out- just with Damian rubbing it in his face it had been on his mind and... Tony looked over at the kid in pure shock. "What?" he whispered weakly.

Peter shrugged as much as he could with a broken arm, his other slung over Tony's shoulder. He kept his eyes staring at the floor, "I'm pissed at you, yes. You screwed up, yes. You screwed us up, big time yes. I'll take the punch offer, sure- much obliged. In fact, I was gonna do it anyway without an offer. But I'd still die for you. Always would."

There as silence as they stood still in the center of the hallway, arms clasped over one another, both covered in blood. The kid glanced at Tony quickly and made a face, "Just- just wanted you to know that."

"Don't get all sentimental on me now, kid," Tony said, just to get over his shock, and not let Peter know how much that meant- the amount of hope that gave him, and the amount of love he had for the kid in that moment. Tony started forward again as he remembered how to walk.

"I was expecting a 'me too', or a 'likewise' or 'same here', but I guess that was just being hopeful," Peter muttered, before squeezing his shoulder as a warning. On cue Tony stopped and they both shuffled to the side, holding their breath as a guard walked down the perpendicular hallway. Peter's fingers curled around Tony's shirt out of instinct, letting go when he realized what he had done. Tony pretended not to notice.

Tony pursed his lips once he was far enough away and said to Peter, "I thought you already knew."

"I do," Peter admitted with a smirk. "Just wanted to hear you say it."

"Verbal confirmation," Tony nodded.

Peter bit his cheek, "Exactly."

"Needy," Tony sniffed.

"Excuse me?" the kid grumbled.

"Likewise," Tony smirked, and Peter's gaze crumpled into that of relief and happiness. Then, determined to keep his guard up, which meant his usual revert to humor, he frowned, "Who says likewise?"

"You just did," Peter remarks sarcastically.

"Quoting you," Tony corrected.

Peter looked over at him with a straight face and swore deadpanned, "If we somehow make it out of here alive, I'm killing you."

"Well that would be a terrible waste, wouldn't it?" Tony sighed, holding Peter tighter against him out of instinct as they peeked around the next corner and continued down the hall.

"I don't care," Peter sniffed.

"Well I guess there's no pressure now," Tony grinned, getting a smile from the kid.

"Oh there's all the pressure. Do we even know where we're going by the way?" Peter demanded.

"Away from where Damian is," Tony said simply, shooting a look behind him, suddenly paranoid that he would see the man following them, but thank God it was just an empty hallway. Tony tightened his grip on the kid just in case, Peter snapping him out of his thoughts.

Peter made a face at Damian's name and nodded, "I'm down for that. So we aren't going in the general direction of the exit?"

Tony looked over at him, "We could be. Did you happen to memorize the blueprints before we were snatched and driven to this remote massive warehouse section in the middle of nowhere?"

"You made your point," Peter sighed in annoyance. "What happens if a guard sees us?" Tony raised the knife and grinned. The kid shook his head, "Everyone knows not to bring a knife to a gun fight. We need to take out a security guy."

Tony raised an eyebrow, "You up for that?"

Peter winced, "No. But if Damian comes at me, I'm not about to stand by defenseless while you go at him with a butter knife."

"Fair enough," Tony nodded, peeking around the corner, keeping Peter behind him. Hearing footsteps at the other hallway- probably another guard making his run, he flicked his eyes to the right as he looked back at the kid. Peter nodded in understanding. He eased out from under Tony's arms and limped into the center of the hallway before collapsing loudly onto his good arm, rolling onto his back and groaning.

The footsteps quickened and Tony gripped the hilt hard. The man came into view and reached for Peter, pointing a gun at him and Tony snarled, surging forward. He knocked the gun away with his bad arm, courtesy of the surge of adrenaline he knew would kick in whenever someone threatened his kid. The firearm clattered across the floor, Peter scrambling to grab it, kicking his foot into the man's knee as he went. Tony slammed the wooden end of the knife into the guard's head and toppled him, helping him to the ground with a shoulder to the chest.

He slumped to the ground, unconscious and Tony winced, pressing a hand to the wound on his thigh.

"You okay?" Peter asked behind him.

Tony nodded, offering Peter his other hand to help him up but the kid slapped it away, pushing himself up off the ground and standing, brandishing his new gun. Tony held out his hand again, more pointedly, for a different reason. "How about we switch?"

Peter reluctantly handed it over and gripped the knife Tony passed to him, beginning to limp forward. Tony grabbed the walkie talkie from the man's belt and unlocked the nearest cell. Peter helped him shove the man inside before they looked down the hallway.

Tony turned in both directions and asked, "Which way?"

Peter shrugged, "Right?"

Tony nodded, "Right it is. You need help walking?"

Peter shook his head, "Nah, I'm getting the hang of it now. You?"

"I'll manage," Tony said firmly. Truth be told, he could use a bit of support, but he wasn't about to reach out to Peter and burden him, or come across needy. Suddenly he felt Peter slip underneath him, the kid's good arm looped around his back. Neither said anything, and Tony desperately tried to keep his weight off the kid, pain flaring in his bad thigh with each step.

"Don't make me do this for nothing," Peter scoffed angrily. Tony sighed and shifted his weight, letting Peter take some of it at his firm request. He leveled the gun shakily as they turned the corner, only for it to be a dead end.

Tony pointed to the door near the end of the hall, "Stairs. Those look like stairs."

Peter made a sound of agreement and they started forward, Tony looking behind him. "Up or down?" the kid asked. "Which will be easier on your leg?"

"Up," Tony lied.

"Tony-" Peter protested immediately as they pushed open the door.

"I'm getting us out of here kid. The key word being 'out'. I'm not about to bury us in the basement just cause it's easier to go down steps," Tony hissed firmly. "Got it? Great. Conversation over." Peter kept his mouth shut and they started up the stairs before suddenly Peter froze. Tony turned and looked at him nervously, "What?"

"They're coming," he said quietly. Tony knew it was his spider senses, the vibrations, and they weren't usually wrong. The kid looked shaken and he said, "They're close. A lot of people. When did you say Steve would get here?" Peter gulped, looking behind them.

"I didn't," Tony winced. "I just know they're close. Damian ran away from breaking my hand like someone lit his pants on fire, so it must have been something big."

Peter winced at the breaking of the hand comment and looked up the steps with a nod, "Well then Steve better hurry up and get here. But we gotta go. Now."

Chapter End Notes

YEASSSS the boys are OUT. KIND OF. NOT RLY. You'll see. Well that was a lot to unpack!!! And there's still a wholeeeee bunch bunch more to come. We're barely reached the top of this hectic rollercoaster and about to plunge down into utter and complete chaos. Muahahaha. Yes. Be scared. Stay on the edge of your seats ladies in gents. I'm very energetic today if you can't tell but I've kept a level head so far yay me. I have a whole lot planned, next chapter is gonna be a huge huge kicker buttttt it may take a while. Life is about to kick in and I'm gonna get busy so I'm sorry if things get sluggish in terms of releasing, but quality will stay the same :) I will not post if I dont think you guys will be absolutely floored by the end. So stick w me ill do my best to keep it 5 days apart, I love you all sm and pleaseeeeeeee tell me what u thought, what you think is gonna happen, all that good stuff you guys are amazing. So stay tuned, stay healthy, and drink coffee! I love coffee >:) and Sherlock. That show is amazing. If you're a fan lmk. Ok sorry for that aside lol next chapter ASAP!! I promise!! I love you all 3000 <3 <3

What Does It Take To Pull A Trigger

Chapter Notes

HELLOOO LOVELY READERS! Man do I have a chapter for you. It's great to be back- I think I did ok on time??? Maybe a day late??? Muahahaha we thrivinnnn >:) Can I just say thank you again???? Your comments never fail to make my day and the SUPPORT on this story is OUTSTANDING and constantly just surprises the heck out of me. I'm so hyped you like it and I am having a blast writing. This chapter is a little intense but let me tell ya, get used to this cuz next chapter will be same level of craziness.

I decided I would do a fun thing and give Damian POV for a majority of this chapter because in some ways we all love reading about that dude and he's super fun to write. He kindaaaa loses it this chapter?

A LOT happens muhahahah, especially between Tony and Peter. Avengers are here, but they aren't...here yet. Make sense? Cool. I hope you all are doing well, enjoying summer, staying healthy, having fun, and not dying because I am totally keeping you guys on the edge of your seats hopefully. Well without saying anything else, I'll let you get into the chapter :) I love all of you awesome people.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Present

Damian walked down the hallway, watching the man kick down doors one by one and search the room, finding nothing. He would never admit it, but yes, Tony Stark had gotten under his skin. Not many people had, but Tony was one of them. Something had clicked and he was now off his rocker, determined to find the man no matter the consequences. The guards following him stayed wary of the gun he held in his hands, afraid he was just going to fire it randomly because he was bored and needed to kill someone. They wouldn't be wrong.

He didn't know how long he walked, but after a moment someone called out there was a locked door. Damian's lip curled and he waited patiently as it was kicked in. A few men entered, and then they walked out with confused looks on their faces. "Sir..."

Damian surged forward, shoving past his men and entering the room. Tony Stark was unconscious on the ground near the center of the room. The man was still breathing, but he was on his side, motionless and quiet, with no weapon in his hands. Damian leveled the gun to do what he said, to kill the man who had gotten inside his brain and wiggled his finger around, but curiosity got the better of him.

He sighed in annoyance and walked forward, still holding the gun, before nudging Tony's side with his foot. The man stirred, blinking slowly and letting out an inaudible groan. Then back to silence, his eyes falling shut.

"I'm tired of this," Damian hissed, planting a kick hard to Stark's stomach.

Tony's eyes flew open and he groaned, rolling away and scrambling back, looking around in confusion. The man cursed when he saw Damian, his face falling as he swore, "You've got to be kidding me."

Damian instantly took in a few bits of information as he looked his enemy over. Tony's lip was split- again- and he had two bruises on his face, punches, so hard it could possibly...knock someone unconscious. If a guard had found him he would have been brought in. So it wasn't a guard, it wasn't him, so that left...

"Where's Peter, Tony?" he asked slowly.

Tony's glare was harsh and truthful. Then it suddenly crumpled and the man's attempt to smile for the first time in a long time, was thwarted. He looked down and whispered, "You...you were right."

"I'm sorry," Damian tapped his ear. "That didn't sound like the answer to my question-"

"It was," Tony said through gritted teeth, suddenly standing up and storming towards him, shoving Damian against the wall. "I said you were *right* you sick lunatic-"

In one fluid motion, Damian ripped out his gun and carefully pressed the gun against Tony's head. With a smile he brought his thumb up and cocked it, and the man stepped back and uncurled his fingers from Damian's shirt, taking his hands off of him. A smirk grew on Damian's face and he stepped forward with Tony, keeping the gun planted. Then, daring his luck, not only did he motion to the bruises and split lip that were fresh on Tony's face but he daringly patted his cheek, making Tony wince. Damian laughed incredulously, "Peter. I can't believe Peter did that."

The man physically flinched. Damian pulled the gun back, but kept it pointed at him, his arm at a comfortable angle at his side. He watched him thoughtfully. Damian had spent these past few days reading Tony, knowing when he was lying, when he was faking, and when he was actually being truthful.

Tony was being truthful.

Peter Parker had slammed his fist so hard into Tony's face that he not only drew blood, but he left two marks. Well...this was a turn of events.

"Wow, and then he ditched," he realized with a hoot, bending and putting his hands on his knees like he had a good laugh before straightening. "I know you had keys and a gun, which you," he looked Tony up and down, "don't seem to have on you anymore," he smirked, with a little laugh.

Tony gave him a fake smile, but it wavered, "Yeah. Peter took them. I didn't see it coming. Even after I got the brat out, I *saved him*-"

"Teenagers are so ungrateful aren't they?" Damian interrupted, greatly enjoying this.

"He said there was no way we'd both make it," Tony continued before he stopped and spluttered, "And- why am I telling this to you?" He waved his hands, "Congratulations. You won. You were right. Are you happy now?"

"Happy. That's a relative term," Damian grinned. In all the ways he had seen this going, this was by far the best. Peter being the one who stabbed Tony in the back. He had seen that coming, but never suspected it would actually happen...especially after since he saw the glare in the boy's eyes when he slammed him into the wall. Peter had fooled him well.

Distracted, Damian waved behind him to the men who he realized were still waiting for orders, "Go find the boy. He can't be far."

"But the Avengers..." one of them asked.

Damian turned and shrugged, "Yes, and?"

The man gulped, looking around at his buddies who were too terrified to back him, "Sir...they're the Avengers."

"Yes, I'm glad you know their name," Damian snarled before firing. The shot hit the ground between his feet and the man jumped. Damian leveled the gun and raised his eyebrows, tired of the crap and not wanting a delay. "Any more questions? None. Good. Tony and I are gonna take a little walk and catch up. Go."

The men hurried off down the hall and Tony spoke to him after a second, "We gonna sit and half a cup of tea like besties now? Or are you gonna just get it over with and kill me."

"I would kill you," Damian admitted, not missing the way Tony tensed, before he smirked. "But seeing that look on your face is just too good. I accepted the first day that I would never really be able to truly break you, you know. I knew I never could. Even if I shattered your hands."

"If you're gonna keep talking, I *want* you to shoot," Tony snarled, taking a step closer, but this time Damian didn't give him what he wanted- he didn't raise the gun.

Damian pouted, "But why would I do what you want me to do? When I'm having so much fun. Your friends are coming, so don't worry, this won't last long. But it will be long enough. Let's go."

Tony shook his head, "I just told you to shoot me. You plan to put a gun to my head and lead me out in fear? Tell me how that makes sense."

"Not afraid to die because you just...lost...everything?" Damian clarified with a mocking frown. Tony's shoulders fell slightly and he gritted his teeth- Damian could tell; his jaw clenched. He lowered the gun and pointed it at Tony's knee, knowing he wouldn't miss. "This won't kill you, I promise. Walk or crawl, your choice."

"You like games don't you?" Tony hissed, beginning to walk for the door, limping only slightly from the wound in his thigh that Damian had gave him not an hour ago. "This is a game to you," Tony said weakly with a shake of his head. "It's always been a game."

"It has been, yes," Damian nodded in agreement. "You're losing."

Tony passed him and Damian followed him down the hall, shoving him forward in the opposite direction of the men. Tony looked behind him, "So you kidnapped the kid, that was always your play. Then I got involved. That, well, was slightly expected but you decided to sacrifice your queen, make the bold move, and take me too. You overextended. And now my cavalry is here," Tony called over his shoulder, "coming to take you away and ruin everything you've accomplished- tell me...how am I losing?"

They had walked some ways and had just turned down a hallway. And at that, Damian just couldn't take it anymore. Before he knew what he was doing, he planted a kick to the back of the man's knee, sending Tony sprawling. Stark fell flat and groaned, scrambling to his feet only for Damian to grasp the back of his collar and shove him against the wall of the hallway they had ended up in, twisting his bad arm behind his back at a painful angle.

"I told you, originally I was going to put a bullet in your brain- make it quick and painless. But I don't think I'll do that now. I think now I can have some fun while they find that brat of yours," he hissed in Tony's ear, a firm grip on his hair.

Tony turned his head as much as possible, "Well then you better kill me first so I can at least get a

shred of guilt out of him when he sees my dead body." Damian was shocked at that and he loosened his grip only slightly. Tony continued, "The whole charade that we hated each other was faked, I'll admit that. At least I thought it was. I still cared about the kid. Obviously Peter wasn't faking- he...he must have truly hated me. There's a reason why he didn't break... because he was playing along with the game while playing his own." Tony was breathing hard, wincing in pain as he made out, "Peter didn't just trick you, Dames, he tricked me. You're forgetting that."

Damian heard the break in his voice, unforced, raw, and real. The man was telling the brutal truth, the truth that ripped his heart out in front of him, hurt him so much so that Tony could just say *screw it*. And that was exactly what he was doing. Damian shoved him harder into the wall and smiled, "You didn't let me finish from before. Instead you rudely interrupted."

"Do you want a thank you card? How many is that I owe you now? Three?" Tony snapped. There was a second of silence as Damian debated what to say. Well he'd take after Tony. *Screw it*.

"I could never break you," Damian announced, feeling himself ease up on the grip and allow Tony turn around. They faced each other, standing dangerously close, the gun at Damian's side as both men let his words sink in. Tony's face fell at the statement, as if he didn't believe he would admit it. Damian didn't think he would admit it either, but he just did.

Damian shook his head, remaining where he was, he and Tony mere inches away. "When we had that waterboarding session and you told me that you could never be broken by me, you weren't lying." He was shaking now, his eyesight turning red as he was filled with such *anger*. It boiled up inside him and made his hands tremble as he spit out his next words. "Because you are so determined to be right, driven by *spite*," he swore angrily, motioning once wildly with the gun, "that the minute you said that you would rather die than tell me anything, you made up your stubborn mind. Even as I held you underwater until you felt it go down your throat, trickle into your nose, and *even when* you stopped breathing."

"Thanks for the recap," Tony snarled uncomfortably, straightening to return the gaze of hate.

Damian delivered his first verbal blow, hissing, "The *only person* who can break you is Peter Parker. And he did it, didn't he?" Damian hissed out every single word and it cut into Tony like a knife, causing him more pain than he had ever caused him in the past couple days. "He. Broke. The great. Tony. Stark."

Tony didn't answer for a minute, and the silence was deafening- triumphant for Damian. Tony simply swallowed and set his gaze, his lip curling only slightly, showing there was still some cockiness left. He cleared his throat, throwing back up that fake smile and raising his shoulders only because he knew they had been slumped, "Well I feel sorry for you then. Because you don't get your satisfaction."

This was true.

"No, I don't..." Damian sadly admitted. "But I can have fun," he finished, his gaze flashing as his chest heated up. Without warning, he swung, catching Tony across the face and the man hit the wall, bringing his good arm up to shield himself. Damian went for his bad one, yanking him forward and jamming his elbow to Tony's cheek. The man blocked it but Damian twisted, keeping hold of his arm and Tony gasped in pain, shoving him off.

"This is my fun," Damian said firmly.

Tony was holding his bad arm, "The Avengers are coming. You said so yourself."

Damian spread his hands and smiled, "You'll be dead by then." Tony's eyes flicked to the gun in his hand and Damian grinned, before holstering it on his belt. "Not that quick of a death, I'm afraid. Not unless you really piss me off and I can't help myself."

"You've lost it," Tony told him. "You've completely lost it, you know that?"

"It's all because of you. And 30 years of drowning in blood. Maybe I'm just a little bit ahead of you, Tony. We do compliment each other so well," Damian snarled. He moved forward and kicked, Tony blocking with a jab to his shin. Tony had the disadvantage and Damian planned to take advantage of that. He swung and Tony blocked it, but he couldn't catch the other punch Damian threw. His fist connected with Tony's face, blood on his knuckles as he pulled back his hand.

Tony staggered, snarling in anger before he looked up, his nose dripping. "Cheap shot."

"Smart shot," Damian corrected happily. "I don't play nice." He threw another punch and Tony blocked it, twisting and hitting in the back with a sharp palm to the base of his spine. Sparks shot up his back and Damian cried out, stumbling forward and spinning, hand clutching behind him.

Tony shrugged, "Neither do I."

Damian snarled in anger that he had gotten a shot off and a growl tore out of his throat. They circled one another, venom in their gazes, dripping with hate and rage. "How does it feel?" Damian asks. "To know that the person you would take a bullet for, would *gladly* be the one pulling the trigger?"

"I've been stabbed in the back before," Tony hissed, a fiery nostalgia that wasn't friendly- evident in his eyes.

"But this one hurts more," Damian said quietly; he had his hand in Tony's wound and now he was going to move it around. "This one hurts more than all of them. The past couple days- everything, was a fake. Him trying to protect you- all for his benefit. You trying to protect him, well he didn't have a problem with that, did he?"

"Shut up," Tony hissed. "Just shut up."

"Make me," Damian mocked, recalling a certain previous conversation. Tony may know how to get to him, well he knew how to get to Stark too. A smile was on his face, a genuine smile and he giggled, "He played you, Tony. And you were actually hoping that after all of this you two could hug and make up, weren't you?"

"I said, shut up!" Tony yelled, surging forward. He threw a punch and drove his knee forward. Damian took the knee as he clenched his stomach and punched Tony in the side, hard in the ribs. He twisted, ducking under the man's swing before shoving him past, turning sharply and kicking him in the back.

Tony sprang up and Damian was already on him, throwing a punch. Tony blocked one of them and tossed his elbow back, which caught him in the groin. Damian doubled over him pain and Tony shoved his knee into his head, kicking him to the ground. Damian's hand reached out and grabbed Tony's ankle, yanking his foot out from under him. He scrambled up and dug his knee into Tony's chest before he punched Tony's bad arm, hard.

Tony growled and kicked him away, and they both scrambled back, using the wall to get up. Damian staggered to his feet as well and gestured with his hands, "I know what this is, Tony.

You're not mad at me."

Tony scoffed loudly, holding his bad arm, "Really?"

Damian sighed, "Okay, maybe you are a little, but this? This...rage, this uncontrollable, chaotic mess that you're turning into? Sound familiar?"

"I'm nothing like you," Tony swore.

"Not yet," Damian winked. "Like I said, I'm just further ahead. Both our worlds came crashing down. Mine was my work. Yours was Peter," he pointed. "We were both betrayed by the one thing we thought would keep us afloat for the rest of our lives. That kept us from drowning in the blood. And if I'm gonna go down, then I'm gonna take you with me."

"Go to hell," Tony staggered forward, out of pure anger and threw a furious but predictable punch.

"I'll see you there." Damian caught it and grasped his bad arm, digging his fingers into it. Tony opened his mouth to scream in pain but it got caught in his throat. Then there was a sudden rumble and alarms started to blare, the hallway flashing that same crimson red.

"Oh, that's a level what? Sounds serious-" Tony whispered before Damian shut him up by squeezing his arm tighter. They were in a lock in the center of the room; Tony had managed to get a grip on Damian's throat. He choked, trying to save air, digging his hand hard into Tony's arm. Both of them yelled in pain, staggering back and forth, gazes locked.

Tony heard gunshots and he grinned in Damian's grip, "I...wonder...who that...is?"

Damian choked, clawing at Tony's hand before he curled his fist tighter, Tony sinking to his knees with a yell.

Suddenly the wall behind them blew up.

He had no other way to describe it other than a massive force, without warning, slammed into his back, small pebbles of rock flying at massive speeds, ripping the back of his shirt as he was slammed into the ground.

It was so unexpected, he didn't even have time to brace. Damian went flying forward, landing harshly, his head smacking against the ground- which rocked. Everything was blurry and fuzzy and- catching on fire. Smoke was everywhere and when the rumbling finally- no it didn't stop. Damian's view was completely eaten by black smoke and he coughed, on his hands and knees, getting to his feet. The structure was falling, the sides of the hallway, the walls even, slowly caving.

He knew what it was. This place was rigged to explode, under his orders. All information would be destroyed, bombs hidden within the walls throughout the entire warehouse section, triggered by a breach. There had been a breach. The Avengers were here. And this place was going to collapse beneath his feet. They were in a coffin.

The ceiling came off in large chunks of concrete, falling and slamming into the ground, shattering into pebbles.

"No," he whispered, spinning around, with a crazed look in his eyes. "No..." There were other explosions from underneath, shots firing and things sparking.

Down the perpendicular hall, the floor was already disintegrating, falling into the lower level like a

slanted ramp. Screams and gunshots echoed from downstairs, and he felt the vibrations of attacks underneath his feet. Damian stood in that hallway, the fire burning around him and he just stared at the ruin, his head still spinning.

His ears were ringing, everything still fuzzy but he heard his enemy speak weakly from behind him, "I think that would be the Avengers."

Damian didn't even hesitate. Without blinking, he turned on Tony who was also weakened and slightly off balanced, similarly covered in soot. Fire was already visible down the hall and as he breathed in, he felt smoke coat the inside of his lungs. His eyes burned and his hands shook, but Damian still pulled out the gun and leveled it carefully.

Tony froze. Damian moved the gun in his hand, snarling, "It's quite cinematic, don't you think? The fire, the smoke. Me with the gun, you on the ground. We need some music."

Tony raised an eyebrow and looked pointedly at the gun like a parent who had told a child he couldn't have his toy, "I thought we weren't going to use that."

"We weren't," Damian shrugged, quite fine with playing the child because, "Frankly, I don't give a crap anymore. I believe," he announced loudly, "the deal was I wouldn't use it, unless you pissed me off. Which you did. You. Pissed. Me. Off."

"Pray tell," Tony said breathlessly, slumping to the ground even further while still clutching his arm, unphased by the gun. "What did I do?"

"You don't give up," he hissed quietly, trying to hide the despair and confusion in his voice. The wall crumbled down to his side but Damian kept his eyes trained on where the bullet was going to pierce Tony's skin. He heard the roar of the Hulk from downstairs and felt the floor give slightly way as that green beast ripped through the structure holding the top floor up but all he could think about was pulling the trigger and finally finishing it. But why was he so mad? He would not admit it. He would not stoop that low.

"I don't play your game, you mean?" Tony reworded the thoughts that had been echoing around in Damian's head.

Answer him. "Yes," Damian spoke softly.

"I beat you, by not playing, that's how it works- that's how I work. You'll never be able to beat me," Tony said firmly.

He looked weak on the floor, blood dripping down his face and the side of his head, bruises covering his face, his crippled arm held to his chest. So why was he inflicting so much damage? Damian had the gun. He had all the cards...no...he didn't.

Tony saw right through him, to his soul, because they *were* each other...like Damian said, he was just further along. Tony coked his head, "You can't even find the satisfaction in killing me. Because that's boring. Your whole life you've wanted a thrill, the taste of power. But you don't have power over me. You never have. You said that yourself. You failed and you're looking for someone to blame and you found someone. But it's not my fault. It's yours and deep down...you know it."

The gun grew heavy in his hand, screams pounding at the walls of his head. Damian was sweating, his heart thumping through his chest and he put his finger on the trigger.

"The only reason you want to pull the trigger is because you know you should and you're afraid of

what could happen if you don't," Tony spoke quickly and the room went dead silent, the air tense and static. "Am. I. Wrong?"

Damian cocked the gun and shook his head, "No. But I'll take a smile from seeing a bullet between your eyes." He gripped the gun and started to squeeze the trigger.

Tony smirked, then he grinned, and then, well...then he did something very unexpected. Tony Stark...started laughing.

Thirty-six minutes Earlier

"This is your fault," Peter hissed, continuing to limp with Tony down the hallway. Tony didn't have to fire the gun yet, but he and Peter had taken down a couple guards from when they had first left off. The group chasing them was gone; they had unlocked a supply closet and hid in there as a group of five passed unknowingly. For some reason, all the cameras in the corners of the hallways were pointed down, like they had been disabled.

Unaware of what good news that might entail and not willing to kick a gift horse in the mouth, they then exited the room once Peter confirmed it was clear, backtracked and went out the door they came. They closed it and jammed it shut, breaking off the handle for good measure. Then they really had no other choice then to continue down the hall giving each other whispered directions.

Which, at their current pain levels and given their history, not to mention the past couple days, was a perfect recipe for an argument. Even before their fall out they had been good at arguing. It was never out of actual anger though, that was the thing. That was why, when they were yelling at each other in the lab, with actual hate in their gazes and venom in their voices, it hurt them to their very cores. And although they were already arguing now, Tony took comfort in the fact that it was feeling like how it had always been: harmless banter and sarcastic quirks that were not meant to stab each other in the back like the other fights they had.

"I said go right," Tony countered immediately in exasperation, taking a quick check over his shoulder. "You turned *left*. Is it my fault because you can't do the little L thing with your hands? Is that what it is?"

"Shut up, where now?" Peter demanded, peeking around the corner to make sure no one was there. Then he said what they were both thinking, "We can't do this forever."

"I think there's a main room up ahead, if it's the same layout as downstairs. We could lay low?" Tony said, looking to Peter for approval who shifted his weight and tightened his grasp on Tony's arm.

Peter obviously didn't like the idea, but it was clear he didn't have a better one. "Sitting ducks. Sure, why not?" Peter sighed and they continued forward, Tony gripping the gun and Peter's knuckles white around the knife. They stopped by the door and Peter tensed, his eyes shooting down the hall. He nudged him in warning as Tony dug the keys out of his bloody and ripped jeans. Peter's eyes were trained to the side and he breathed, "Hurry up. Someone's coming."

Tony shoved a random key in and it didn't work, his hand jerking forward from the force. Tony fumbled and tried another one, grinning as the key sank into the handle and the knob turned with an easy twist. He and Peter hurriedly shoved it open and practically fell inside, Tony managing to stay on his feet to shut the door as quietly as possible while Peter bolted it. They both held their breath as footsteps passed, shadows sliding under the door before disappearing.

"So we just stay here?" Peter asked, instinctively moving back to hook Tony's arm around his shoulders, Tony actually...doing the same- obviously before they both realized it was no longer needed. They moved slightly away, breaking eye contact, unwilling to admit that the physical contact was the reason they had been able to make it this far. Like it or not, both were beginning to accept the fact that they needed each other, and always had.

Before either could address this shared issue, the room suddenly went red. Any light that was dimly lit in corners turned a crimson shade and they both gravitated towards each other to the center of the room, Tony leveling a gun, Peter gripping his blade. They turned, searching the room they were in, eyes similarly narrowed, mouth a straight line.

A flutter of hope graced the room; they knew the alarms weren't for them. The Avengers were here. The Avengers were close. They were finally going to get-

"We're screwed," Peter whispered, leaning against the wall next to him.

"Thanks for your confidence," Tony muttered, flexing his bad arm with a small wince. The pain sparked a memory that Peter too was hurt in the same spot, so looked over and motioned, "How's yours?"

"Broken," Peter said flatly back.

"No, really?" Tony sighed.

Peter gave him a look and then lifted his arm, "I- I may need you to snap it back. So- so that the bones heal properly."

The look he gave him broke Tony's heart. The kid was tired of pain, tired of being hurt, and more importantly, tired of being used to it. But he knew it had to be done, and the only person who could do it properly, was Tony. The person who had hurt him more than any electric shock or punch, who he knew never wanted to hurt him again. But there was no one else. Once again, all they had was each other. Tony still didn't know if that was a good thing or not.

He nodded slowly, "You sure?"

"I said it, didn't I?" Peter said sharply, hissing as he moved sideways and offered his broken arm to Tony who hesitantly put his hand on Peter's shoulder, wincing as he felt around for the displaced bone.

Peter flinched under his grip and Tony said, "Easy. Just need to see."

Peter didn't respond, he only curled his other hand into a fist and breathed harshly through his nose, withholding any further flinches. Tony rubbed his palm into position and then lowered his good shoulder to take the spot, since he didn't trust his weak arm. Exchanging a look with Peter who grit his teeth, knowing he couldn't make noise, he breathed, "One, two-"

Tony jerked his shoulder and felt the crack under his hand. Peter let out a strangled yelp, but it was quiet, the kid screwing his eyes up in pain.

"Better? Okay? Kid-" Tony asked urgently, reaching a hand out to steady him after backing up to give him space.

"Fine," Peter said through pursed lips, pain flickering in his eyes. His hands were shaking and he took a deep breath that got cut off by a gulp, and Tony awkwardly stood, unsure of what to do. Peter shook his head, setting his gaze and jaw, as if nothing had happened. "So what now? We wait

for the Avengers? If they even are here?"

Tony heard the bite in his voice and he instantly hot back, "Well why else would Damian go running like a scared puppy? Especially when he really wanted to break my hand?"

"Maybe his mom called," Peter grumbled.

Tony snorted. "Maybe his mom called-"

"What?" Peter laughed.

A lot of weird things had happened to Tony Stark. Finding this particular sentence funny was one of them. Tony started laughing, a smile spreading on Peter's face as they both started to giggle quietly.

"Everyone knows," Peter laughed. "If you miss a call from a mom, that's a death sentence. May killed me when I was at a party once and let my phone update? It went on do not disturb and I nearly died that night."

"Nice one kid," Tony laughed, wiping his eyes, suddenly picturing Damian sweating bullets talking to an old lady in a rocking chair with a stern expression on her face. "I'm picturing it," he whispered with a chuckle.

Peter grinned again, shaking his head and pressing a hand to the bridge of his nose as his shoulders shook from suppressed laughter.

Tony composed himself first and shook his head, "His mom died, so- no. I don't-" he cleared his throat in attempt to sober the room, "I don't think she was calling."

Peter shook his head, killing his smile, "No. No, now that's not funny."

They both lapsed into confused silence. Tony broke it by looking over and saying, "Kid, I just want you to know...I'm...I didn't mean the stuff I said these past couple days."

Peter's eyes were on him- he felt them. The boy nodded, "I know."

"And-" Tony looked down and shrugged. "When we get out of here, we need to...talk. Okay?"

"Yeah, we do," Peter scoffed in agreement.

"Not here though," Tony clarified.

Peter smirked, "No, definitely not here."

"But when we get out..." Tony clarified.

"Yeah," Peter nodded.

He looked around at the room which was bigger than both of them had originally thought, with plenty of hiding places if they needed to take cover. "So what, we just wait here until-" Peter stopped and looked up, his eyes narrowing. A second later there was a small crackle and Tony's eyes found the speaker in the corner that Peter had been staring at. That wasn't good.

"*Anthony Edward Stark?*" came a singsonging voice.

Tony froze. Peter actually growled; no one, *no one* ever used Tony's first name, let alone his full.

He hated it and it sat completely wrong with him. But the voice was recognizable, and Tony tensed, curling his fists. He felt a hand curl over his arm and Peter shook his head, gripping his sleeve as much as he could while holding a knife, his re-set arm cradled to his chest.

"Tony, he's just trying to piss you off," Peter hissed.

"It's working," Tony grumbled.

"You want to play a game? I'll play. You hide. I seek. Look, you're already doing it," Damian giggled.

"Psychopath," Peter muttered.

"I was going to kill you quickly, Tony. And your kid. Now I'm not gonna be so generous. So you better hope you picked a good hiding spot, and you better hope the Avengers keep their promise. Because ready or not...here I come."

Tony blinked in disbelief, "He's done it. He's completely lost his mind."

He heard it in the man's voice. Any ounce of sanity that he had somehow managed to hold onto for all this time was gone. Damian was off his rocker, because...why not? His world had just shut down, why hang onto sanity, it only slows everyone down anyway. That's why all the best scientists are mad. And although he confirmed that the Avengers were close, they weren't out of the woods yet. Damian was coming. For him and Peter. And if he found them before Steve did...

"What do we do?" Peter asked quietly.

"We play," Tony hissed. He motioned Peter with a nod of his head and the kid followed him to the back of the room. Tony began to look at which spots that could not be seen from the door. "More accurately, you play. I've never been good at following the rules. That's why people hated playing games with me, or hide and go seek." He opened a small cabinet and removed the shelves.

"Meaning," Peter demanded and he would have crossed his arms if he *could* have.

"Can you fit in there?" Tony asked simply.

Peter narrowed his eyes, "I don't know. But I'm not going to even try until you tell me what's going on."

"Sometimes you've got to let the seeker find you, to make sure someone else stays hidden," Tony said firmly. "I was very competitive as a child. And rich."

"You...cheated?" Peter raised an eyebrow.

"I cut the wire, and I won," Tony reworded the previous statement. "Always a way out, that's my motto. If a guy offers you a way out, you take it- doing the exact opposite of what he wants you to. It's worked for me in the past."

Peter's face contorted into a glare, "What are you saying?"

"Punch me," Tony spluttered, pointing at his cheek.

"What?" Peter asked incredulously, his eyes widening with confusion.

"Look, we've got to make this look real so how about you listen to me and-" Tony tried to explain, knowing Peter probably didn't want to-

Peter's fist connected with his jaw and Tony stumbled with a groan, managing to stay on his feet. He shook his head, shaking out his dizziness and gulped; he hadn't expected the kid to hit that hard. He already felt a bruise going and Tony flexed his jaw, hissing in pain, "Right. Okay. Good, now-"

The second fist slammed caught him off guard. Peter had swung again, catching him on the other side of his face. Tony's head whipped to the side and would have fallen if a hand hadn't snagged his arm. Tony blinked and straightened himself, ripping his arm out of Peter's grasp, the kid's knuckles bloody. He looked at the boy in disbelief to mask the shock of how hard Peter had thrown the second one, "Really? I said punch me. Punch is singular."

"Sorry," Peter said dryly. He wasn't sorry. He barely looked phased. His fist was still curled and there was fire in his eyes that Tony tried not to acknowledge.

Tony shrugged, "I deserve that."

"I wasn't done, but I believe that's all we have time for," Peter remarked smartly.

Tony blinked and then sighed, "Got it. Okay, well. You're gonna stay in here. Damian is gonna find me. I'm gonna say that you knocked me out, which is almost the truth, and that you left me on my own."

"You're making yourself bait," Peter realized. "Then once you're out, Damian won't look here twice. I'll stay here until the Avengers find me."

"Exactly," Tony said firmly.

Peter narrowed his eyes and looked at him, before he nodded slowly. "Okay."

"Okay?" Tony choked, thinking Peter would put up a fight or someth- wait. Of course he wouldn't. Things were different now. He should be happy Peter wasn't objecting; this was what he wanted. No resistance was better. Ignoring the stinging pain in his chest he gave Peter a smile and motioned forward, no use being commanding because Peter would comply anyway, "Alright, go. Before they catch us in the act."

Peter gave him a look that Tony could have read if he tried but he didn't because he didn't think it would mean anything. He honestly had no idea what to think. Did Peter care about him? He had no idea.

No, no, of course he did- remember the kid said he would die for him. Tony had a sudden discovery in that moment, just a thought. Was it just because he needed to keep him going? Peter undoubtedly knew him well enough to know that it would have given him a boost...it all made sense. Tears threatened to prick at his eyes but Tony was too empty to care.

"You should take the gun," Tony handed the kid the firearm who nodded, reaching to grab the gun with his good hand. Floored at how this sixteen year old tricked him into thinking he cared, knowing he would do anything to save him, letting him get hurt because of him and pretending like it had any effect on him- the kid obviously had been faking it all. He was letting him go. Because it would mean he would survive. It had all been for show, and Tony was too blind to see it.

Suddenly, Peter then toppled forward off balance and Tony instinctively caught him, straightening him after a second of staggering. They both moved away and brushed themselves off without a word, but it was different now. An old tenseness had resurfaced, and Tony hated it. His back tingled and hurt- ironic.

"Thanks." That was all the kid said. He didn't even look at him. He knew what he did. He knew

Tony knew. This whole thing was just-

"And the keys," Tony added absentmindedly, handing those over as well. There was a lump in his throat, a disbelief that rocked him to the core, and Tony could barely stand up straight. He didn't know what to think anymore. Every moment that he had been so sure, he was now over analyzing, hearing a snark in Peter's words that he hadn't heard before, thinking about possible underlying meanings, or reasons that Peter could have been playing him the entire time.

Peter simply nodded, staring at him and Tony stepped back, motioning weakly. The kid obeyed and curled up so he could fit in the cabinet and Tony shut the door behind him, cutting off any attempt at a goodbye. There was nothing to say goodbye for. Peter had played him, so he obviously knew what he meant to Tony. Tony knew what he meant to Peter- clearly not as much as he thought. He guessed the kid's protectiveness only went so far.

His breath caught in his throat and he exhaled shakily, running a hand through his hair as a feeling of dread crept through his chest and made its way into his heart, preparing to choke any last bit of hope he had left. And from there he just spiraled, changing memories to fit this new idea of betrayal, convincing himself so many lies that it became a weak truth. And it shattered him.

Tony bit his lip, ripping a cut open from an old punch and he went back to the center of the room by the door. He dropped to his knees in defeat before he slid on his side, blinking at the blank ground. He was in shock. Tony had been in shock before. Many times. It usually triggered anxiety attacks. But this was different. He felt like he did when Peter was on the operating table...helpless, useless, ruined, broken...

But this time Peter hadn't saved his life, he had taken it.

But if he was gonna die for the kid, Peter better get out.

So this better work.

The Avengers had reached the warehouse. After almost an hour of a very tension filled flight, they had made it to their destination. No one spoke, they didn't need to. The minute the jet landed they hit the ground running, guns blazing, shield thrown, red energy spiraling forward, arrows hitting their targets...

Natasha smirked at Hulk's roar and she crouched as the ground next to where she was taking cover was peppered by bullets. "It's been a while," she called, firing over the scrap of car she had ducked behind.

Hulk grinned and looked at Steve who nodded and threw his shield, knocking the door open. He pointed. "Smash."

Wanda took out the surrounding with Vision. Rhodey, Sam, and Bucky let all hell break loose with their guns. Steve charged through the front door with his shield that had landed back into his arm. The look on his face matched all the others.

An arrow sank into the chest of a man who had been aiming at him and Steve didn't even have to thank Clint he just raised a hand in acknowledgement.

Fires had started within minutes. The structure was old and weak, and already the walls were crumbling. But they whirled and fought and got past the perimeter, got past the men that met them in the front. It was child's play for them on a *normal* day. This was not a normal day. But as hard as

they fought, the damage they were causing was more than Steve had anticipated.

"Rhodey, take a team and search the lower levels. Remember the blueprints. Search the spots we highlighted first," he said, putting up his shield to deflect oncoming bullets before he was knocked out of the way by Vision, he and his men met by a yellow blast from the mind stone. The beam made Steve think of Tony, which only fueled his determination.

"The rest of you guys go with Cap!" Rhodey demanded as some split off with him. He nodded to Steve before firing off down the hallway and blasting through a wall.

Cap pressed a hand to his ear to get into coms, "We need to find Peter and Tony, fast. Move forward. HULK! That means you too."

Natasha arrived at his side, kicking someone in the groin and throwing him towards Cap who slammed him in the face with his shield. She stood and blew hair out of her face, shooting someone behind her without looking. "Since when does he listen to you?"

"He's gonna bring this whole place down," Clint said worriedly, dropping to the ground from wherever he had been perched, shooting an arrow before trapping a man's neck in his bow and slamming him into the wall.

"If we have Tony and Peter that's fine with me!" Sam said through coms, his voice crackling. *"Buck on your left."*

"Yeah, but we don't yet," Natasha growled, reloading her guns and firing in less than two seconds.

"Anyone got eyes on some sort of tech room in here? It wasn't on the map," Bucky said and Cap could hear his machine gun from down the hall.

"No," Steve said, before he found the stairs and motioned everyone forward. Wanda put up her hands and a wall of red energy rose from the ground, cracking through the concrete. The remaining men's bullets bounced off harmlessly and she thrust her palm forward, the wall carrying everyone back and slamming them into the wall. "We're heading upstairs."

"They've disabled scanning. And I can't turn it on, I'm jammed while we're here," Rhodey alerted him.

"That's not good," Wanda cursed next to Steve who shook his head as Hulk barreled past, running through a wall and disappearing with a roar.

"No, it's not," Clint agreed, shooting an arrow that pierced a man just as he came into view. He pitched over the side of the railing and fell past them.

"Viz, you got anything?" Cap asked hopefully, reaching the top of the stairs and kicking a door into the men that were running to open it. Natasha fired a few shots just in case.

"Same spot as Rhodes I'm afraid. Although I have uncovered a series of detonations triggered by our entrance. We're doing only half of the damage. The other half is self inflicted and it will bring this entire warehouse complex down."

Cap cursed, "How long do we have?"

"Unsure," Vision responded weakly.

"Depends how many more of these go off," Sam coughed.

"We just were met with one a couple ways behind us," Bucky explained. "Knocked us off our feet and it was a nasty son of a-"

"Do we have any estimate of how long?" Cap demanded.

"No. Not at all. But not much time," Rhodey said breathlessly.

Natasha cursed and Clint looked around, unwilling to show any emotion even though Cap knew all that was pumping through his veins was anger. Wanda waited for his call, her lips pursed, hands sparking with red energy.

"We'll keep looking," Rhodey assured him through coms, but then they went radio silent.

Cap unwillingly put a hand to his ear, tuning into a different channel. "Ned, we need you buddy."

They had one job. To get back their friends. This man had taken their family. And if they had to go through hell to get them back...they would do it. Even if the entire world came crashing down around them.

Present

Tony couldn't help it. He started laughing. It started out as a smile, and then a small giggle and he can't believe he's laughing...down a barrel of a gun. But he is. Relief washes over him and he sees the pathetic, shocked look on Damian's face who still tried to keep up the evil villain smile he had plastered on his face.

But then he couldn't help himself. Damian's eyes narrowed in suspicion and he leveled the gun, gritting his teeth and asking slowly, "What?" Tony continued laughing and the man pursed his lips in fury and demanded, "WHAT!"

Tony composed himself and smiled sweetly, narrowing his eyes, "Peter Parker's behind you."

Damian turned slightly as a gun pressed against the back of his head, making him wince and straighten in shock. Tony could now look past Damian, and Peter came into focus, his gaze furious and fierce, hands steadily gripping the gun with all the intent to fire it as long as Damian still had the firearm pointed at Tony.

It was sheer protectiveness, a glimpse of the unhealthy, undeniable codependent bond they both shared. It was a look that Tony had missed, that he hadn't seen in a while- in a very long time actually. He thought he would never see the look again. It was *his* look, the look he gave anyone that laid a finger on his kid. But this time it was on Peter's face, and at that moment, Tony could care less about the fire, about the smoke, about the fact that the ground could just drop out from under them, about the fact that there was a gun pointed at him.

Even Damian saw the seriousness in Peter's gaze, the small switch that was clicked that made Peter downright terrifying. Few people got to see it. Damian was one of them.

"Drop it," Peter snarled, his voice firm and calm, a tone reserved for when he was really pissed. "Or I swear to God," Peter said simply, "I'll pull the trigger."

Damian slowly complied, dropping the gun and Tony kicked it away weakly, relieved as it skidded down the hallway. Peter had his eye trained on Damian as he walked over to Tony who was staring in relief, shock, confusion, and disbelief. Peter offered him his hand and Tony gratefully took it.

The kid helped him to his feet as he aimed the gun with his good arm.

"You okay?" Peter asked quickly, glancing quickly at Tony in concern.

"I...you-" Tony responded weakly, his mind spinning. Was he okay? *Was he okay?* What kind of question was-

"You weren't gonna let me say no," Peter said firmly. He didn't take his eyes off Damian, but he addressed Tony with the softness of his voice. "We didn't have much time and I didn't have a better plan. I knew there was no arguing with you, so I didn't argue."

"What?" Tony said quietly.

"If I said no, would you have let me stick with you?" Peter demanded.

Tony stammered, "N-no."

"What would you have done?" Peter asked.

Tony searched his brain and found himself saying, "Maybe knocked you out-"

Peter scoffed, smiling slightly, "That's a very you thing to do. Right. You never would have let me come with you or stay, and maybe we would have gotten both killed if I had. Wasting time could have killed us both. I needed to make sure you thought I was out. I went along with your stupid plan because I knew you would be less likely to know I'd go and sabotage it. I mean, you knew I wasn't gonna just let you..."

Tony was frozen. It made so much sense. It was a very Peter thing to do. Why hadn't he- It was then he realized Peter had looked over as a glance out of humor, but stopped when he saw the look on Tony's face. A look of a man who had been broken, and was slowly putting himself back together. Tony met his eyes timidly and it all crashed into Peter.

Peter seemed deflated, letting out a breath of disbelief. He tried for a weak smile but his voice still cracked as he attempted humor, cocking his head, "Three months did a lot didn't it?"

Tony was hurt by that sentence, and rightly so. Three months ago he would have caught this. He would have known exactly what Peter was doing before he did it, and even if the kid had tricked him, he would have known something was wrong. How could he think Peter would do this? After everything they had been through? He looked at Peter in sadness who returned the gaze and tried for another smile, but it was weak and full of pain that he was desperately trying to hide.

"Yeah," Tony said harshly, licking his lips and finally finding his voice. The massive knife that had been in his back suddenly dissappeared, but the wound was still there, but it was self inflicted. He couldn't bear to look at the kid.

"Well, you're welcome," Peter said, trying to keep up the humor that helped he and Tony cope with what was going on between them.

"Are you two done? It's been great watching this soap opera with front row tickets-" Damian said sweetly, and Peter swung the gun, hitting him across the head. Damian groaned and fell to the side, his palm slapping down on the floor.

Peter ignored him as he looked at Tony. He frowned and said, "I even slipped you the knife when I fake fell. Why the heck didn't you find it and use it?"

Tony remembered Peter suddenly stumbling and slamming into his arms for what seemed to be no reason except he tripped. Another thing he should have noticed. *Three months did a lot, didn't it?* Tony reached behind him and sure enough, hooked to his back pocket, was the knife. He brought it out incredulously, staring at Peter in disbelief.

"You're an idiot," Peter laughed slightly to cover up his pain, gun still trained on Damian. Then his smile fell and he cocked his head, his voice quiet as he turned to look to Tony. He was begging him to contradict what Peter was thinking. He was asking him to tell him what he wanted to hear, that Tony couldn't have possibly thought he would leave him for dead to save himself. Peter's voice was timid and hopeful, "You didn't actually think-"

Tony lowered his head in shame. Peter sucked in another breath and exhaled shakily, the hope drained from him. In that moment, one of the stitches was roughly yanked out, painfully too- like a bandaid being ruthlessly ripped off.

"I didn't know what to think," Tony whispered, as if that explained it, as if that wasn't a lie. He knew what he thought. He was ashamed of it.

Damian grinned, wiping blood from his head with his sleeve as he winked, "I might have antagonized him a little bit."

Peter gripped the gun and snarled, "Give me one good reason of why I shouldn't shoot you right now?"

"Wow, do I finally get attention? I've been waiting patiently," Damian sighed, clasping his hands and smirking up at the two of them.

"One reason," Peter repeated, a spark reignited as he remembered why he was holding the gun in the first place. Still protective of the man who had hurt him in more ways than anyone else had. "Now," Peter snarled furiously.

"No," Damian kept his gaze locked with Peter and he got to his hands and knees. Then slowly, he stood, Peter keeping the gun trained on him. "I want you to shoot me." Tony and Peter both frowned, stepping closer to each other out of instinct, Tony gripping the knife that Peter had slipped in his belt loop.

"Because if you pull that trigger, Peter, you're in for literal hell," he said simply. Damian narrowed his eyes and shoved his hands into his pockets, rocking on his heels and asking in a rather mocking voice, "Have you ever killed anyone before?"

Peter didn't answer but Tony knew he hadn't. The kid adjusted his grip on the gun and swallowed.

Damian started to smile, "Thought so. Ask Tony about the first time he took a life. It doesn't leave you," he shakes his head. "No, it sticks with you forever. Toomes gave you nightmares enough, by having a few little pieces of concrete fall on you- how sad."

"How dare you-" Tony swore, yanking out the knife and taking a step forward but Peter narrowed his eyes and tossed his head, moving his foot to the side, a signal for Tony to stand down.

Damian pointed to Peter, frowning at Tony. "I'm talking to the kid, if you don't mind, Tony?" He looked back at Peter and smiled, "Imagine what this will do. Every night you go to bed, every time you close your eyes, you will see me, you will see yourself pulling the trigger, and you will prove that you're a killer. You'll be scared of yourself- we know what that's like, don't we Tony?" He winked and pointed to the both of them, "We came up with a little theory...that Tony and I are very,

very similar."

Peter took a step forward, his firm grip returning to the gun as he spit, "Tony is nothing like you."

Damian raised his hands in surrender, "Whatever you say. I should have known, Peter, that you would never *truly* betray Tony. You're far too loyal for that." He cocked his head and said quietly, "Like a kicked puppy, always coming back."

Peter snarled, "Shut up."

"Shoot me!" Damian yelled suddenly, making both Peter and Tony jump. He grinned and spread his hands, "Shoot me, or you won't get the chance again, kiddo."

"Don't-" Tony swore immediately.

"-call him that," Damian finished in a mocking voice, rolling his eyes. He focused on Peter, staring down the barrel of the gun and cocking his head with a raised eyebrow. "What's it gonna be, Peter? You gonna pull that trigger? Because if you do, you're not only taking my life, you're signing yours away too. So shoot me."

Peter gripped the gun and pursed his lips, putting his finger on the trigger and concentrating.

Damian sighed and then looked at Tony, "Time's up." He made a fake lunge forward to Tony and Peter instantly dropped a protective arm, throwing it across his chest since he was in front. Damian then saw his chance and slammed both palms into Peter's bad arm that had been left holding the gun.

The man knew them both. He knew how to get to Peter, which was through Tony. He knew that by pretending to go for Tony, that would catch him off guard. Damian knew that Peter would stop at nothing to protect him, that if threatened, Peter's instinct would be to throw up that arm and stop him. He used that. He always used that.

Damian punched Peter hard in the face and the kid fell backward. Damian moved in and Tony sidestepped in front of him, lunging with the blade in a downward arc. Damian pushed his arm aside at the last second but it still slit the man's arm making him snarl. Tony twisted it and jammed it as much as he could into his shoulder before elbowing him across the face. Damian knocked the knife out of his grip but Tony now had the upper hand, curling his fists around Damian's shirt and snarling, "Don't touch him." He pushed the man backwards hard and he skidded across the floor with a cry of pain. Unfortunately he was now near the gun Tony had kicked away from him.

The kid was already up and he took a running slide, slamming into Damian, the gun clattering towards the corner and Tony dove forward to help. They had gotten to their feet and Peter ducked a punch, Tony grabbing Damian's wrist that he had thrown and twisting it behind his back. Peter punched him in the ribs and then the face but then Damian slammed his knee forward into Peter's bad arm. The kid recoiled, staggering back with a cry of pain.

Tony slammed his fist across Damian's jaw in retaliation and dug his heel down on the man's foot. Damian swore and twisted around, Tony moving with him. Tony took a punch to the face to grab the man's wrist and Damian had grabbed his arm. Once again they were locked in a bloody struggle, until Damian drove his forehead into Tony's- sending him staggering backward, before planting a foot into his open chest.

Tony slid across the floor with a groan, his head smacking against the ground. He groaned and rolled onto his side, only to be kicked in the ribs and then straight in the chest as Damian stomped

down. He brought his foot up to bring another hit but he never made it.

He was spun around by his collar and Peter swung, his fist colliding with Damian's face. Tony lifted a foot and Damian tripped, falling to the ground. Peter was on him in an instant, yanking him up and kneeing him in the groin. Damian bent forward and Peter moved under him, fitting his shoulder into his chest and lifting. Tony reached and hooked his foot around the man's leg, pulling it out from under him as Peter pushed forward. The kid flipped him to the ground over his shoulder and Damian hit with a loud thud.

In a desperate attempt he reached for the closest gun since the other one was much farther, crawling like a maniac across the floor. Peter snagged his jean leg at the last second and pulled with all of his might before scrambling up and practically falling over him, forcing the gun further down the hall.

Tony rolled onto all fours and staggered to his feet, coughing from the smoke, before making his way forward to land a punch across Damian's face. Damian launched a kick to his bad thigh and Tony dropped to one knee, slamming his fist into the man's side. Unfortunately, he took a heel to the knee and he went sideways, his head hitting one of the fallen parts of the ceiling, the concrete slab now stained with blood.

"Tony!" Peter yelled, starting forward in sheer anger. The kid was so furious that he tackled Damian on the ground, which gave the man an opportunity to throw him off him, kicking him in the chest. Peter, not at full strength, couldn't stop himself as he hit the wall hard and slumped to the floor.

Tony groaned and blinked, his eyesight blurry. The fire was raging around them, smoke clouding at the ceiling as it started crumbling down around them, the ground quaking. Tony, stirring from his spot on the ground, holding the cut on his head as blood dripped down his hand, now hearing the pounding noises of gunfire from a level down that made his teeth hurt. His ears rung from the screams and yells as the entire warehouse vibrated.

But another cry brought his senses spiraling back, every bone in Tony's body telling him that something was wrong. His gaze snapped to the side in panic, and his chest heated up with anger. Peter was on the ground and Damian had gotten up. The kid was desperately trying to defend himself while cornered. He was kicked harshly in the side and then in his bad arm. Peter curled up, crying out in pain as he attempted to crawl forward, only to be kicked in the face, falling back against the wall.

Damian staggered and reached the gun, cocking it and aiming it at Peter who froze on the ground in pain, cradling his arm. The man was dripping with blood from the many hits he had taken, barely able to hold the gun straight but he snarled, "Don't worry. I won't miss. Let's finish...what we started...hey kid?"

Tony got to his feet, hands on his knees, thigh threatening to give out, but Tony knew it wouldn't. His kid was cornered, in pain, scared, and he was looking at him. Damian, on the other hand, didn't notice him. His gaze was on Peter, so firm and so determined that Tony was able to take a step forward and he didn't even know.

"You were like me, Peter. The younger one. Being hurt by the one person you thought you would always have. Being abandoned and forgotten," he cried out angrily.

Tony took another step, unable to see anything except the man pointing the gun, and his kid frozen in fear. He was too far away. He was too far. His thigh burned and Tony felt blood trickle down the side of his face.

Peter sucked in a breath as Damian leveled the gun. "It was *always* about you. You were the target. You were the captive." It wasn't anger in his eyes. It was...peace. He looked so calm as he whispered, "I was always going to kill you."

"Tony," Peter whispered weakly, his eyes full of fear. He locked eyes with the man, as if trying to convey everything that he wanted to say in the last seconds before-

Damian didn't care that it was a sixteen year old in front of him. He just pulled the trigger, aiming for Peter's heart.

"NO!" Tony screamed.

Time slowed.

The bullet traveled, a loud sound echoing in the small hallway making two of the three people flinch.

The bullet made contact, painful contact. It sank deep. Eyes opened in surprise and downright agony.

Peter gasped.

And Tony fell, blood spreading across his shirt like red veins.

Chapter End Notes

.....sorry.

ANYWAY *changes name, moves to the middle of nowhere so no one can kill me*

LOL THAT WAS FUN

Now that I'm safe, I do ask you don't go looking for me, but stay tuned for the next chapter! You may think omg that was what she was talking about this is so crazy ahhh, yeah this is only half of it. So be prepared for a lot more. I hope you liked that one, I had a lotttt of fun with it, super awesome to write. So please tell me what you thinkkkkk <3 I love hearing from you guys. Next chapter ASAP let go with 4-6 day ish, and it's gonna be as crazy because the whole place is collapsing, the Avengers are going crazy, Tony just got freaking SHOT, Damian's not dead, May has no idea what's going on....should I continue?? Well ANYWAY hope you all are doing well, I am going to make popcorn because popcorn is great, andddd watch netflix. :):):):):)

Don't die. I love you all 3000 <3 <3

Into The Fire

Chapter Notes

Hi.....lovely.....readers.....I'm sorry.

Anywayyyyy :) :) :) :)

Hope you all are doing well!!! Enjoying summer! Getting sleep! All that fun stuff lol.

This one is....intense. I won't sugarcoat it. So I do hope you enjoy, and once again thank you guys so much for all your support, it's been insanely encouraging and just ahhhh so awesome. You all rock!!

I had a lot of fun with this one but it was already probably the hardest chapter to write???? A lot of complications and we have a ways to go. This was right around the usual post time so hurray! Glad to keep you guys in the edge of your seat thought- that's always fun. Anywho, stay healthy everyone, and enjoy the chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Pain and fear. That was all Peter felt. He had stared down many guns before, that had never phased him. But for some reason, now it did. Damian's eyes bore into him like fire and Peter shifted uncomfortably, not wanting to risk moving away in case the man pulled the trigger- because he *would* pull the trigger. There was no doubt in that. This wouldn't end until he pulled the trigger.

Tony got up on the right side, staring equally in horror, his gaze locking with Peter, expression showing the same emotions Peter felt were rolling off him in waves. Tony shouldn't have been able to get up- not that quickly. Peter, sure, he could have, because he wasn't human. But Tony somehow furiously staggered to his feet the minute Peter let out a scream as Damian's shoe dug into his broken arm. And Peter saw him, that motion leaving him speechless. In that moment, Peter tore his gaze away from the gun and stared at Tony, the man who bore an expression that Peter hadn't seen, to it's full extent at least, in three months. Part of him thought he would never see it again. But there it was, and it made Peter's heart clench. He had always taken comfort in Tony's protectiveness. In a world where he was a superhero, always helping others, it was nice to know someone had his back.

In that moment, Peter let all the anger wash away. It was like nothing had happened between them- like they were back how they used to be, before all the fighting and betrayals.

"Tony," Peter whispered so simply. It was a question and it was a statement that meant a thousand words.

Just his name.

Only his name.

He filled it with as much as he could and hoped it would be enough.

Peter saw Damian's finger tighten around the trigger, and he heard it click as it was pulled. He flinched at the shot- so did Damian. Tony didn't flinch however...he just let out a scream that sounded like 'no' to Peter's ringing ears.

And then moved.

He *moved*.

Peter gasped as the shot rang out and echoed, and then he watched, in horror, in terror- a scream ripping at the sides of his throat- held back by a sob. It wasn't in slow motion, no. It played out in real time, which for Peter, had never happened before.

Tony jolted, his eyes widening with pain. He gasped and choked, Peter stuck on the ground, frozen in shock. Tony's face contorted with pain and he reached forward and gripped Damian's arms in front of him, his knees buckling. Damian let him fall in shock and Tony hit the ground, his entire body shaking, already bloodied hands trembling as they tried to press down on the wound that was soaking his shirt.

No.

Oh God.

NO.

For a second, no one moved.

Peter's entire world came crashing down. He forgot how to breathe. His eyes were wide and they stung with tears. Somehow he managed to scream, and the heartbroken yell of terror echoed in the hallway.

"TONY!"

Tony was writhing in pain, strangled sounds of pain coming from his throat. Peter's chest was tight, and everything stopped around him. Then his fist started to clench on the ground and his eyes wandered from Tony's face to the wound, to the gun...to who was holding it. And all he felt was anger.

Peter doesn't know what happened next, because his vision got soaked with red. A wave of protectiveness washed over him and his chest heated up. A glare reserved only for the few people that he hated in this world suddenly was plastered on his face. In a flash, he was up and running. He charged Damian and tackled him, both of them slamming into the ground, the gun clattering across the floor. Peter punched him hard in the face, breaking his nose instantly, blood splattering the floor. Damian clocked him once on the side of his head and flipped him over, trying to pin him and gain the upper hand, moving for Peter's throat.

But he was not fighting the same Peter now. There was a different look in his eyes. This was a desperation fueled, determined, furious teenager. Peter was downright terrifying because no one, *no one* touched Tony- let alone *shot* Tony, and got away with it. Not on Peter's watch. There had always been stipulation that Tony was more protective of Peter than Peter was of Tony. At this moment, that statement was ripped to pieces and discarded.

There were few things that scared Damian in the world, but Peter could tell by the look on the man's face that he knew he was going to die. And he was scared.

Peter shoved his hands away and bucked his core up, pulling Damian's head into the ground and kicking the back of his knee. He shoved his shoulder hard and Damian landed flat on his back next to Peter, who fiercely jammed his elbow as hard as he could into his jaw, the man spitting out blood and crying out in pain as he felt the bone break.

"This is for every time you *smiled* when you punched him," Peter seethed, punching him again.

The floor caved a couple feet away, the hallway shaking as more fire roared up from the lower level. Peter scrambled to his feet and looked; it was a long drop to a bed of rocks below. A perfect final resting place for the man who had caused both of them so much pain. Peter snarled and got another punch in, ripping the skin around his knuckles without a single wince. He grabbed Damian's collar, yanking him to his feet before driving his knee into his stomach. The man doubled over and Peter ruthlessly shoved him backwards, making him stagger. Damian's mouth was dripping with blood, nearly unconscious from Peter's relentless hits. His face was swollen and his breathing was raspy as he weakly swung his fist, desperately trying to stay on his feet as the teen stormed forward fearlessly.

Peter caught the punch Damian threw effortlessly, possibly breaking a finger as he grasped his hand. The boy snarled and twisted the man's wrist behind him at an awful angle- breaking it immediately, keeping them face to face and shoving him forward. With fire in his eyes, he continued to shuffle him forward to the drop, Damian planting harsh kicks and punches that Peter didn't even feel.

They reached the edge and Peter pushed him forward until the only thing keeping him from dropping to the bed of rocks and flames was the grip he had on his shirt.

"Pete!" Damian choked, spitting up blood.

Peter pushed him further, the man grasping his arms in desperation. His gaze was cold and dripping with hate. "Don't call me that," he seethed.

"Peter," Damian corrected fearfully, one of his arms reaching forward and slipping something into Peter's pocket without him knowing; the kid was too enraged and only focused on his enemy's face.

Peter's gaze was like fire and he hissed, "This is what you get, you evil son of a--"

"Nightmares," Damian pleaded, his eyes wide with fear, clawing at Peter's hand with wide eyes, one swollen shut. "You'll never get past this," he rasped, his voice cracking with terror. "It will ruin you," he whimpered, looking over his shoulder as his feet scraped the edge, trying to righten himself.

"I don't think you understand something," Peter snarled firmly, his eyes cold and dangerous. "I will do *anything* for Tony."

"That's your weakness," Damian hissed, gripping Peter's shirt as he pushed himself backward, heels digging into the ledge.

Peter yelped as he tried to stay on his feet, the man trying to pull him down with him. He shook his head and yanked at the man's fingers which were curled around his collar. "Shut up," he hissed, groaning with effort.

"It's always been your weakness. I enjoyed hurting him just to see the look on your face," Damian grinned, tightening his grip as Peter groaned and shoved backward in both anger and desperation. Damian got him face to face, gripping Peter's shoulders, blood coating his teeth as he snarled, "I'm not dying empty handed, kid. It looks like I'm taking you with me."

"Get. Off." Peter's jaw locked in effort, his muscles straining as he tried to keep them both up, his feet slipping, trying to shove Damian off him-

"Let it happen, kiddo," Damian said gleefully, tightening his grip on Peter as he started to fall

backward, carrying the boy with him. "Make sure I die, make sure I can't hurt Tony anymore."

That hit hard. Peter almost let go. He would do anything to save Tony, and if going over the edge meant Tony would live, Peter would be the one to push off and topple forward. But it didn't. Fear crept into Peter's stomach, not because he knew he was going to die, but because Tony was behind him, with a bullet hole in his side, and Peter couldn't save him. If he fell, he wouldn't be able to save Tony, the man who had jumped in front of a bullet for him. If he fell, Tony died.

BANG

Damian's eyes opened in pain and confusion. Peter flinched, breathing hard, jumping at the shot. They both looked down at the hole in Damian's side, blood spreading through his shirt as the man gasped and choked.

Peter's instinct kicked in and he desperately gave the man's chest a hard shove. Damian's gaze tore away from the bullet wound in his chest and he cursed- very quietly, his hands unraveling from Peter's shirt as his legs gave out.

They exchanged one last shared gaze during the entanglement of limbs as Peter let him go, trying to get him as far away as possible as an awful expression came over the man's face and an inhuman scream tore out of his throat.

"Peter, don't look," a voice says sharply from behind him.

Peter obeys in fear, a massive flame rising up as the man slipped off, disappearing over the edge with a scream. Peter felt the heat as his world shook beneath him. He didn't watch Damian fall; Peter flung himself backwards with his eyes shut tight, collapsing and shaking on the ground with his hands over his head. He hears the painful thud and a couple of nauseating snaps, along with the end of the hallway caving in as well as the ceiling which collapsed on top of the hole, muffling the screams of pain.

Shaking, Peter weakly raised his head, moving his hands away. He twisted and looked behind him, seeing Tony on the floor as well, propped up by an elbow, hand pressed against his bleeding chest, the other holding a gun that had just been fired.

Peter stared at him in utter shock, both of them breathing hard, their chests rising and falling rapidly.

Tony breathed a sigh of relief before his face screwed up in pain. He falls to the ground, the gun slipping from his grasp. Peter winced and pulled himself forward across the floor, reaching him finally and gripping his shoulder, slipping his good hand under Tony's head.

"Tony- Tony! Oh God..." Peter looked down at Tony's hands which were covering the bullet wound and a lump formed in his throat, his stomach churning. He put his hand out and recoiled it, his eyes starting to sting, "Oh God..." Blood was trickling through the man's shaking fingers, pulsing almost, soaking his shirt and creating a small puddle on the ground.

Tony smiled weakly, his eyes shining with pain as he coughed out, "He- shouldn't have- called you- kiddo-"

"Yeah, well, that will teach him. Good shot," Peter admitted in relief as he heard Tony's voice. He had heard it a second before but this time it was different. This time he was next to him. Peter let out a light laugh for the man's sake before he attempted to sober his voice and winced. For some reason he tried to smile, as if it would bring him comfort.

"I need to see," he said firmly but gently. "Tony, I need to see it."

"It's- it's not bad-" Tony stuttered, looking at him with a confident smile, "It's not bad at all. Just help me up and I'll-" Tony's voice broke off at the end, and when he said broke, he meant shattered. It cracked and was gulped down, Tony clamping his teeth together, squirming on the ground which only worsened the pain.

Peter instinctively held his shoulders before lightly touching Tony's trembling hands that moved away from the wound at his silent request. Tony raised his head weakly and looked at it, breathing hard and gulping with fake confidence, "See? Not- not that bad-"

Peter stared at the wound for a quick second, gulping. There was so much blood. So much of it. Tony let out a gurgle, coughing up some to add to what was already covering his face from the hits he had taken. Peter shook his head and forced eye contact, stuttering and blinking, "Okay- okay, you're gonna be fine. I just need to- I need to take the bullet out-"

Tony winced in pain and immediately shook his head, weakly grabbing Peter's hand before he could do anything else, "Easy, Hollywood. You- watch too many movies. Leave the bullet there. Pressure. I just gotta-" His hand was shaking as he tried to lift it.

"I gotcha," Peter moved his hand to his chest, clamping Tony's fingers around the bullet wound. "Just keep it there. Hold on, okay? Just...just hold on."

Pressure. Stop the blood. Peter fumbled for the hem of his shirt, ripping a long strip before he tore some off of Tony's too. His fingers were slick with blood by now as it pooled around them, soaking into his jeans as he laid on his knees. He cursed as Tony let out a groan of pain, his hands sliding off his chest and thudding to the ground as the man squeezed his eyes shut, arching his back in pain.

"No. No, hey," Peter moved his hand to cup Tony's cheek, locking eyes with him. He hit his cheek lightly, "Stay with me. This is gonna hurt," Peter said weakly, twisting Tony's shirt between his fingers. "I've got to stop the bleeding."

Tony's breath hitched and he made eye contact with Peter before giving him a nod. The man clenched his jaw as Peter twisted the shirt and pressed it into the hole in Tony's side, flinching as the man let out a strangled sound of pain and took a gulping breath. Once it was in place, Peter folded up the next strip of the shirt and clasped it against the injury, feeling Tony's body recoil under his touch. Then he repositioned Tony's hand. "Right there," he instructed. "Keep it there."

"Well this seems vaguely familiar," Tony choked out quietly, shooting him a small smirk as he tried to take a deep breath, digging his head into the ground in pain.

Peter shook his head, biting his lip, "You're not about to make a joke right now. And I'm not about to laugh."

"My therapist said humor was my coping mechanism," Tony groaned, writhing in pain, his legs tensing. "I told her I was glad she thought I was funny."

Peter laughed at that one before he shook his head again, firmer this time, and looked around at the crumbling hallway. The floor dipped as more sections fell down into the lower level, fire catching a couple feet away. Peter sheltered Tony instinctively as the ceiling shifted, pebbles falling and he remained crouched over him until the rumbling stopped and stability returned...somewhat.

"You okay?" Peter asked firmly.

"Yeah, peachy," Tony winced.

Peter smirked before he looked around and cursed, his fingers curling around Tony's sleeve, "We've got to get out of here."

Tony nodded and waved him forward, "Yeah. You're right. You go. I'll catch up."

Peter shot him a look, "Shut up." He cursed again, silently and said, "Can you stand if I help you?"

"Kid," Tony smiled.

Peter knew what he was going to say. The smile told all. It was a mask, as if saying it with a glint in his eye would somehow convince him, or make it easier for him to hear. It was almost selfish, like Tony did it for his own sake, but Peter knew that wasn't the case. The thing he was suggesting proved Tony was the least selfish person out of all of them.

The man's voice was somewhat calm as he whispered, "Go."

"NO!" Peter immediately yelled, slamming his hand so hard into the ground that it cracked beneath his fist. He was surprised by the intensity in his voice, cutting Tony off with a glare. He hadn't meant to yell right off the bat, it was just all the anger he felt by knowing what Tony was going to say, combined with him actually saying it-

Tony jumped in shock and Peter put his shaking hands up, about to run them through his hair before remembering they were covered in Tony's blood. Peter looked down at his palms and realized they were shaking. The red liquid coated them and his arms. He was drenched in Tony's blood. Why?

Because Damian had been aiming at him, and Tony had gotten in the way.

The bullet was meant for him. The bullet should be in his side right now. He should be the one on the ground, not Tony. Peter curled his hands into fists to keep them from trembling, his stomach turning from how slick they were. His throat closed, his chest heating in anger, tears of guilt coming to his eyes. But the emotion that took precedence was determination, because Tony had jumped in front. And Peter wasn't about to let him die for him. Peter wouldn't allow that. Ever.

His gaze hardened and his head snapped over to Tony, "Fine, I won't be nice. I'm getting out of here with you, whether you like it or not. So sit up!" He slipped his hands beneath Tony's shoulders, tilting him up with an arm around his back, pressing the pieces of shirt hard against his side. Tony stifled a groan, his head dipping to Peter's collarbone with a small noise of pain. Peter winced, throwing his arm over his good shoulder, swallowing a sob and making sure his voice didn't shake for Tony. "I'm gonna lift on three, you ready?"

"Yeah," Tony said weakly, gritting his teeth.

"One, two, three," Peter said harshly, and together they staggered to their feet, straining to keep their balance. Peter turned to face Tony who was leaning against him and he swore, "You stay with me, you got that? We're getting out of here and if you quit on me, I swear to God, I will beat the living crap out of you."

"Noted," Tony grins sleepily, his good arm tightening around Peter who held him closer to his side, keeping his other hand pressed against the wound against Tony's chest. With each drip of blood that rolled over his hand, Peter winced, the weight getting heavier.

This was his fault.

This was his fault.

"This is my fault," Peter said out loud, without really meaning to. He held back a curse and bit his lip; he knew he just opened up a can of worms.

"No it's not," Tony instantly snapped back. "Don't get all sappy now, your drill instructor was working. You break out the tissues and I'll sit down and watch a chick flick and we'll both die."

It was a true warning, urging Peter to keep going, to keep them both going. Physically he would; he made sure both of their feet kept stumbling forward, and Peter would die before he dropped Tony or let him slip out of his grasp. He would carry him out if he had to, but mentally....mentally Peter was lost. Mentally, Peter was starting to break.

Tony could tell exactly what he was thinking and he muttered, "No, Peter- don't-"

"Shut up," Peter seethed in anger, but it was misdirected. He wasn't mad at Tony, which he didn't think he would ever say due to the past three months. He was mad at himself. Mad that he had let this happen. Mad- no, *horrified* that he was covered in Tony's blood, the person he was supposed to protect. "Don't you ever do that again, you understand me?" he demanded, his voice as loud as he could make it, yet it still came out as a smoke choked rasp. "You let me take the bullet," he cried.

"Pete," Tony whispered, squeezing his eyes shut.

The first tear fell, leaving a hot trail down Peter's cheek, stinging as it ran over a cut. He recounted his previous thought. He *was* mad at Tony. He was downright furious. Why? Because Tony had moved forward and wrestled the gun, pressed it against his own side, just as Damian pulled the trigger. Because he took a bullet for Peter, and he wasn't okay with that.

"No!" Peter shouted, a half sob strangling the end of it, "No. Stop. Tony, you- you do not step in front. You *let him* shoot me. You Let. Him. Don't you ever-"

Peter trailed off, realizing his words sounded very hypocritical, and rather ironic in a twisted way. Tony noticed too, but said nothing.

The pain of knowing this is what it felt like, when Tony had held him in his arms, covered in Peter's blood, made him want to drop to his knees in shock and just let the world fall around him. To know this was the pain that Tony felt when he carried him, when he slipped his hand under his legs and around his back and Peter's head fell limp against his chest. To know that Peter, so many months ago, had been crying out same as Tony- to actually hear those sounds come from the mouth of the person you were supposed to protect. Peter suddenly wanted Tony to have never found him or even gone looking for him; he'd rather be tortured for eternity than have the bullet that was meant for him, sink into Tony's side.

He suddenly wished Tony was anywhere but here.

He suddenly wished-

Oh.

Oh.

And then Peter understood.

His voice came out quiet as they staggered down the hallway, "This is what it felt like?"

Tony didn't answer, but when Peter looked over at him, he saw it in the man's eyes, which were now glistening. Both caught their breaths and possibly next words in their throats and stayed silent; Peter already knew the answer. And in that moment, Peter realized he had just caused Tony even more pain.

He cursed himself for even asking and instinctively tightened his grip apologetically. He hoped Tony knew what that meant. The floor groaned behind them and Peter felt heat against his back, the crackling sound that had been gaining on them as they continued walking, now rather close. He looked over his shoulder and cursed, fire catching on the ceiling a couple feet away. Smoke billowed out and they coughed, their lungs coated already with one breath.

They ducked their heads down and continued. Peter had a lot more he needed to say, but right now they needed to get out. "How do you feel about walking faster?" Peter said nervously.

"You calling me old?" Tony joked as they quickened their stride- just in time too; the ceiling collapsed where they had been a near second ago.

Peter cursed, guiding them both around the corner, sticking to the side of the wall that was not a mess of flames and black smoke that was clouding around them and thickening every breath. Peter coughed and waved his bad arm in an attempt to clear it, painfully aware of Tony's breathing that was worse than his.

"Where are they?" he suddenly cursed. "They're here, but where are they?" he demanded. The gunfire and screams had not stopped, nor did the shifting of the ground. Peter kept their footing desperately.

"They were always bad with directions," Tony mumbled, a ghostly smile curling faintly on his lips that were dripping blood. "Watch them bump into us- left!" Tony shouted, his hand curling around Peter's shirt and weakly pulling. Peter had just felt a small tingle down his back and he and Tony slammed into the far wall which thankfully was solid as the floor they had been standing on dropped out, crumbling into the lower level. They slumped against the wall, breathing hard, exchanging looks.

"Close call," Peter huffed, helping him inch across what was left of the floor, rocks skidding off and dropping through.

"Too close," Tony agreed, his shoulders relaxing as they made it to safer ground. "I want to get out of this stupid place," he muttered with a wince, sweat beading around his forehead, his jaw clenching as he grit his teeth, helping Peter push open a door.

Peter raised an eyebrow, "That makes two of us."

"Although it does look better than before," Tony made a face. "More vibrant."

"Yeah, cause it's on fire," Peter snickered.

"No, that's not it," Tony said seriously.

Peter looked over and Tony broke into a smile. A laugh bubbled in his throat and Peter let it out, shaking his head as they continued forward. How could they find humor in even the darkest times?

Then, before either of them can react, the ceiling caves in front of them, a roar filling his ears, a pounding in his head as he tenses and tries to brace, positioning himself in front of Tony. Peter's knocked off his feet, slamming into the floor, Tony as well.

The back of his head hit the ground with a nauseating crack, and he goes rolling down the hallway. Peter gasped in pain, clutching his bad arm as he flipped onto his side. Flashbacks of the exploded plane on the beach came to mind in the midst of the flames and smoke. Peter cried out, coughing, grasping at the ground as he struggled to get onto all fours. His head was spinning, his balance completely off, his eyesight swimming.

Peter pressed a hand to his head to try and clear the ringing of his ears and he felt around, croaking, "Tony!"

"Well that was a blast," Tony said quietly and Peter whirled, seeing him pinned by one of the pipes that had fallen from the ceiling. Peter reached, recoiling as his hands burned against the scorching metal, hissing against his fingers. He ripped off his shoe and stuck his hand inside, wrenching it off with gritted teeth before grabbing a fist of Tony's shirt and pulling him away from the raging fire.

Peter shoved his shoe back on and took a shaky breath, whirling around to look at their options. Sweat and blood drenched him and Peter could barely see; his eyes were stinging so much. He was exhausted. The world was a mess of orange and yellow flames, the ground was barely stable, the ceiling threatened to cave, the air was poisonous to breath- the lights were flickering...

Peter collapsed next to Tony in the center, everything spinning except for the man next to him who was shaking and sucking in slow breaths. Tony was the only thing he could see clearly; everything else was out of focus. Peter ducked as flame erupted on the ceiling and he grit his teeth as the building shook. He squeezed his eyes shut, praying for it to stop. Tony's hand curled around his pant leg and Peter gripped his good shoulder.

"It's ok," Peter choked out, as the world burned around them. "It's okay," he gulped.

They looked around in dismay. Both ways were blocked by fire. They had nowhere to go.

And they both knew it.

"Pete-"

"It's gonna be fine. We'll get out of here-" Peter assured him, his voice shaking as he pulled Tony closer, warily watching the flames starting to lick the floor and close around them.

"Peter," Tony said firmly, and in instinct, the kid looked at him.

"No." It was nothing short of denial. Peter wouldn't say anything else. He shook his head again, blinking harshly. His voice cracked and he forced a smile to hide his fear, "Nope."

"Go," Tony whispered, and Peter closed his eyes with a wince, still shaking his head.

"Stop," Peter hissed.

"You have to," Tony insisted.

"Who says I want to?" Peter snapped, locking gazes with him.

"Kid," Tony replied weakly, his gaze falling at that confession.

"I'm serious," Peter said quietly.

"Pete, you're not dying for me," Tony whispered.

"And neither are you. Actually, no, scratch that, you just took a bullet for me so I guess I'm gonna

return the favor!" Peter said in fury.

"You returned the favor when you took a glider to the stomach!" Tony shot back with a wince, claspings his hands harder to his side and squeezing his eyes shut in pain.

Peter weakly smiled, his voice soft, "Are we keeping score now?" Tony opened one eye and scoffed, and Peter's good hand tightened around his arm. "Tony, the biggest mistake of my life was letting you walk out that door," he said softly, avoiding Tony's eyes. "I'm sorry I didn't stop you."

Tony's face crumpled in pain and he whispered, "I'm sorry I walked out."

Peter gave him a weak smile and then took as deep a breath he could into his shoulder so he could filter out some smoke. He shakes his head, "I'm not making the same mistake again. We are not getting separated. Not again. I won't. And you can't ask me to because roles reversed, you know you would never leave me."

Tony cursed, glaring at him weakly, "Don't- don't pull that card. That's cheating." Peter smirked and Tony pleaded with him to even consider it, trying to provide reason, "Peter, you can make it out. I'm dead weight- I'll slow you down. Trust me kid, I never want to leave your side again, that's the last thing I want. I mean that."

Peter knew he meant it, of course he knew he meant it- he could see the pain in Tony's eyes as he spoke through gritted teeth, "I want to protect you, but right now, I can't. The only thing I can do is tell you to get the hell out of here-" Peter opened his mouth to speak but Tony cut him off with a look, "You've got to listen to me, kid, please. Get. Yourself. Out."

"Except I've never been good at listening to you," Peter smirked, tears in his eyes. He deemed the entire attempt futile in less than a second and he looked up at Tony, knowingly, urging him to acknowledge his sudden victory over the argument. "Have I?"

Tony's face fell and with the look they exchanged, he understood there was no convincing him. Tony's head fell to the ground and he choked out, "You're an idiot."

Peter made a face and slowly sat down next to him, pressing a hand against his wound to help him try and stop the bleeding. "You gonna insult me in my last moments?"

Tony grinned and winced before he muttered, "I want you to know that these past three months have been more hell to me than anything I've ever been through."

Peter looked down at him and rolled his eyes, clearing his throat and changing his previous statement, "So you want to have a chick flick in my last moments?"

Tony shrugged as best he could, "I went for the extremes."

Peter let out a laugh and he smiled weakly as he looked around, "Well..." he sighed. "There are worse ways to go."

Tony snickered, "Are there?"

Peter chuckled, "I don't know." The fire crept closer and Peter curled his feet up and sighed, putting his hands out and rubbing them together.

Tony snorted, "You're psychotic."

"I wish we had marshmallows," Peter joked.

"Remind me never to die with you again," Tony grinned, pressing a palm against the ground and wincing. Peter helped him sit up with his good arm around his back. Tony nodded to tell him he was stable and they sat there for a minute in silence. Then Tony turned, his gaze fierce and he clasped Peter's cheek, locking eyes with him. His lips were pursed, his eyes narrowed as if he had a lot to say and no time to say it.

"I know," Peter said quietly with a firm nod.

"You know?" Tony repeated quickly.

Peter nodded and Tony gave him a quick smile and ruffled his hair, tugging him towards his chest. Peter laid his head down and closed his eyes, tears trickling down his cheeks. "You know too, right?" he asked quietly.

"What a stupid question," Tony responded, taking a deep breath and tightening his grip on Peter's shoulder. "I've never been one for apologies but I guess I'm gonna have to make an exception, don't I?"

A laugh bubbled in Peter's throat before he suddenly felt a rumble. His head snapped up and he narrowed his eyes, looking at the far wall. "Maybe not," he said.

Tony tensed as Peter sat up, a shaking hand pressed against his back, "What- what is it?"

Just then the wall shattered, crashing down with a massive cloud of dust and smoke, and a shiny dinner plate with a star on it glistened in the light from the flames. Steve stepped through with his shield out, waving his hand to rid the smoke, his eyes finding Tony and Peter instantly.

"Oh look, our knight in shining armor," Tony drawled, but Peter could hear the relief in his voice.

"Let's give him a nice greeting," Peter agreed.

They both flipped him off.

"Got em!" Steve yelled back in pure happiness, starting forward with a wide grin on his face. Wanda appeared behind him and red energy shot out, extinguishing the flames in Steve's path. Cap sprinted, making it to the end of the hallway in seconds.

"Welcome to hell," Peter announced, dropping the gesture.

Cap reached forward, ruffling Peter's hair. "Hey, kid."

"Long time, no see," Peter smiled weakly.

Cap grinned, before crouching by Tony's side and clasping the back of his neck. "You good?"

"Does it look like it?" Tony asked, weakly reaching up to grip his best friend's hand. That meant, I've never been so happy to see you in my life.

Steve shook his head, "God, it's good to see you guys."

"Cutting it close, don't you think?" Tony grumbled as Steve slipped an arm around him and lifted him up with the help of Peter who ducked under his other shoulder. Neither Tony or Peter mentioned that they had been just about ready to die a second ago.

"All worked out as I planned," Cap said firmly with a smirk.

"Oh, sure," Peter scoffed, sharing a smile.

They staggered forward, Wanda letting the room collapse behind them as they made their way to the exit. "You get shot?" Cap asked worriedly, looking at Peter's hand that was clasped against Tony's side now they his arms were slung over their shoulders.

"No, someone was just happy to see me," Tony drawled with a wince.

"Took you long enough," Peter snapped angrily. "Where the hell have you guys been?"

"Sorry about that," Cap winced. "I'll give you a recap of everything later. They did not make it easy for us to find you both. And thank Ned. He hacked into some satellites and scanners for us to figure out where the heck you guys had run off to. I just got off the phone with him."

"You got my best friend involved with this mess?" Peter growled, wincing as they reached the bottom of the stairs. Tony's head lolled to his chest and fear crept into Peter's heart. He jolted him sternly, "Hey. Stay awake."

"Yeah, I'm up, I'm up," Tony grumbled in pain, his voice tight, but he squeezed Peter's shoulder apologetically for scaring him.

Cap raised an eyebrow, answering Peter's question once he knew Tony was okay, "Uh, he blackmailed us?"

Peter shrugged, "Sounds like Ned."

Natasha rushed to their side and Tony grinned weakly, "Romanoff. You miss me?"

"Don't tell anyone," she responded cockily, rubbing Peter's back with a wink and a small smile. "Hi Peter."

Peter returned the grin, "Hey, Nat."

As more Avengers came trickling in, Rhodey reunited with his best friend and helped him down the rubble to the lower floor, Peter only willing to let Tony out of his grasp for one second. He quickly hurried down the rocks, stumbling to gain his balance before he ducked under Tony's arm again, the man's eyes nervously searching for him until he was back under his shoulder.

The Avengers had cleared a path to the jet and once they were outside, Cap and Nat stuck by their sides, the other Avengers looping back to make sure the entire warehouse was in flames and that nothing could be salvaged.

"Well you guys made quite a mess," Peter admitted, looking over his shoulder.

"Hey, we raised hell," Clint shrugged, poking his head out of the jet. "It's what we do best. Glad to see you both are okay."

"This is your definition of okay?" Tony muttered. "Good to see you too, Barton." Clint gave him a salute before returning into the jet and going to the cockpit to start getting it prepped and ready.

Nat sat Tony on the ramp and ripped out the first aid kit, starting to apply bandages to stop the bleeding until they got to a hospital. Peter had ducked under his arm and set him down, Cap getting a sling on the jet for Peter's arm. Peter winced as Steve bent his elbow and tied the cloth knot around his shoulder.

"I don't really know what to say," Cap admitted nervously.

Peter pressed his lips together and nodded, "Yeah. Me neither. Thanks though, I think I should say thanks."

Cap grinned, "No thanks needed. Sorry we were late to the party."

Peter was about to comment on that when suddenly his jean pocket started buzzing and Peter frowned, looking down. He hadn't remembered putting anything in there. Cap made a face as Peter dug out a beat up phone, staring at it in his palm. It was ringing, vibrating in his hand and Peter narrowed his eyes before flicking it open.

Damian's eyes shot open and he gasped in pain, letting out a scream. His leg and arm were bent the wrong way and he was pinned down by a massive section of rock that was cutting into his chest.

Gritting his teeth and still screaming, he slammed his broken arm into the ground and the bone snapped back. Letting out a howl as a result, he was greeted by a surge of adrenaline that he used graciously, clenching his blood stained teeth and widening his crazed eyes as he shoved his hand into his pocket.

Breathing hard, Damian pulled out a phone and dialed a number, the voice of his contact meeting his ears. "Chris," he choked out, throwing up blood to the side as he sucked in a breath. "Do it," he rasped, his hand clenched hard around the phone. "DO IT!"

He jammed his thumb against the end call button and blinked blood away from his eye, dialing the next number, his breathing layered and heavy. He could feel blood filling his lungs and climbing up his throat and he choked, his eyesight fading.

Revenge was the only thing that kept him going. The boy's voice answered and a sick grin appeared on Damian's face as the world burned around him. He didn't even feel the flames climbing up his leg and burning away his skin.

"Hi Pete," he snarled.

Peter frowned, wincing at the static from the call and he sighed, "Hello? Hello?"

"Hi Pete."

He knew that voice. He hated that voice. *He knew that voice.* Peter straightened and nearly fell down at the same time, his breath caught in his throat and he let out some strangled whimper. Peter spun in fear to face Tony who immediately tried to sit up, wincing in pain, his eyes wide. Peter started shaking and he muttered. "No. No you're-"

Tony had told him not to look but he had been the one to give the final push off the edge and send the man into a bed of sharp rocks and flames. And despite not looking, Peter knew he had fallen hard; he had heard the sounds of bones breaking and the screams of his enemy before the wall itself had collapsed and crushed him.

"Dead?" Damian laughed and it turned into a coughing fit before he made a disturbing gulping sound and whispered sweetly, *"In about one minute, yes."* The man's breathing was painful to listen to, his voice cracking and coated with blood. *"This is my call. I get one phone call before I go away*

for life. Isn't that the law?"

"What do you want?" Peter hissed, still staring at Tony who was tense with his hand pressed against his side, gaze alert.

"How's Tony?" Damian asked, as if he knew he was looking at him.

Peter's fist curled and he glanced at the older man protectively before he brought the phone close to his mouth and snarled, "I'm gonna kill you."

"Won't need to, although I love your enthusiasm. Gold star," Damian said happily. *"Like I said, I'll be dead in a minute."*

"Then why are you calling?" Peter screamed furiously, and both Nat and Cap flinched, exchanging looks of confusion. Tony was the only one that knew what was going on but it wasn't like he can do anything.

"What, I can't say hi to my favorite kid?"

"I'm not your kid," Peter said harshly and Tony tensed and snarled, starting to stand before Natasha's hand was pressed firmly to his shoulder, keeping him in place.

"My leg is on fire right now. And I like it," Damian said softly. *"Do you know why?"*

Peter winced at his voice he kept his eyes wide open, trying to convince himself that Damian wasn't next to him, whispering in his ear. "No," Peter responded.

"Ask me why, Peter."

Peter bit his tongue and shook his head, frowning. He hated pleasing him, but he did what Damian asked, "Why?"

"Because I can hear the fear in your voice, because you know I have something planned, you know I'm calling for a reason, and let me tell you, Peter, I love it. It feels good."

Peter shook his head at the insanity that met his ears before pressing his lips tightly together in disgust. Then he tried again, more timidly, "Damian, what do you want?"

"I said I would take someone with me to the grave." Peter straightened, suddenly alert, his protective gaze falling on Tony almost instantly. "I tried to shoot you but somebody," the man hooted, "got in the way. So I thought fine, I'll take Tony, but I had a feeling that guy was going to pull through, and I was right, wasn't I? So then I was like, what the hell, I'll drag you down with me! But then I got shot! I've got a piece of rock shoved into the bullet wound right now, stopping me from bleeding out. One false move and I'll die, which is what I plan to do right after I hang up- so that leaves who?"

There was a sickening pause before Damian's voice changed and he said, *"Yes, I'll take 'Peter's Loved Ones' for 200?"*

Peter bit back a curse, swallowing his disgust for the man on the other line. His hands were shaking and sweaty. Peter turned around in desperation and looked back towards the compound, wondering if he could go run back and find him- no...it would be too late. He hovered a hand over his head, curling it into a fist and let out a stifled yell, "Damian, what are you doing?" he demanded. Tony's gaze was killing him as they exchanged glances, tears biting at Peter's eyes.

"What are you doing?" Peter swore again with a choked sob.

"Well lets see, I couldn't get your father figure Stark, which is a really shame, I must say. Although the look on your face when I shot him- I'll stay on track. The other kid, talkative, likes Star Wars? Your friend right? Fred? Ted? Something like that. Too young. Didn't do enough to piss me off, and to be honest, his death...it wouldn't hurt you bad enough," Damian said thoughtfully.

"I swear to God, I will hang up this call," Peter said furiously, his voice cracking. His grip tightened on the phone and Peter was afraid he'd shatter it in his hands.

"So who does that leave? Please hold for one moment. Transferring you now," Damian let out a giggle layered in blood and Peter squeezed his eyes shut.

And then his heart shattered.

"Hello?"

Peter nearly collapsed. His eyes widened with fear and his breath caught in his throat. He swallowed harshly, his hand trembling against his ear as he tried to find his voice.

"Um, hello, who is this?"

"May," he sobbed, spinning towards Tony whose gaze crumpled.

Peter sucked in a shaky breath, tears filling his eyes and he shook his head. His heart was pounding, his lungs tight with panic. He could feel the fear eating away at him, this awful feeling in his gut, rising from deep down. He felt an ache that crept up his throat and made him swallow harshly, biting at the inside of his cheek as he sank down into a crouch, about to throw up. He stood again, the back of his arm pressed to his mouth in an attempt to compose himself.

"Peter? Oh my gosh!" his aunt laughed happily. *"About time! I missed you! Is this your new phone? How are you feeling?"*

Tears streamed down Peter's cheeks and he bit his lip and made out, "I'm good. I'm oh *God-*" His voice was high and breaking with every word and he yanked at his hair, curling and uncurling his hand, the sling getting annoying so Peter just ripped it off in fury. He had barely felt the agony of his bad arm while moving it, because it was drowned by a worse pain. Fear.

What does he do? He has to protect May-

"I suggest you say goodbye. Oh, and she can't hear me, don't worry," Damian said softly.

"No, please don't-" Peter sobbed, pressing a fist to his head, fingers clenched with dry blood between them.

"It's been so crazy here but I knew that your phone would get fixed eventually. Horrible timing right? As for me..." Peter pressed his lips together, tears running down his cheeks as his aunt continued.

Damian's voice was louder in his head and it made Peter jump, *"Yeah, so I planted one of my own men when she went overseas on her trip. Obviously she made friends with him, she trusts him. If he were to just walk up, she wouldn't even think twice until it was too late. Don't worry Peter, I got constant updates through my contact. She was worried about you, talked about you all the time."*

Hot tears streamed down Peter's cheeks as he gulped down a sob, his shoulders shuddering. "You

shut up, you sick bastard," he swore quietly, but he didn't even think either of them heard him.

"Peter," Cap started forward but Peter swung his arm, barely missing him, a warning to stay back; he would kill anything and anyone that came close. There was fire in his red and bloodshot eyes.

Anger and fear had a stranglehold on his breathing, his lungs burning hot, his voice foreign to himself...weak. "Don't- please-" he pleaded furiously as a cry shoved through his grinding teeth. "May, May I love you, I love you so much-" he whispered.

"Peter? What's wrong? Don't what? I love you too honey, but I can barely hear you, there must be bad reception. I swear, if we have to get the phone fixed again-"

Peter squeezed his eyes shut and clenched his teeth harder, letting out a strangled scream before speaking quickly through the lump that was building his throat, "May, please just listen to me. I need you to run, okay?" He lowered his voice, trying to make it not shake but he couldn't. "Run, please."

"Peter, what's going on?"

"May, run!" Peter yelled. "Anywhere, just go- please!"

"Say goodbye, Peter," Damian whispered.

"NO!" Peter yelled, letting out a sob, tears spilling down his cheeks and shaking his head, his feet pounding the pavement as he started forward and retraced his steps in fury. "No, no, please no. May listen to me- you've got to get out of there-" Panic rose in his chest and Peter froze where he was, his entire body shaking, eyes wide and fearful as he pleaded with the last family he had. "May, go!"

"Hold on Peter, I can't hear you that well, I'm sure you have a lot to tell me-"

"May!" Peter sobbed desperately, his face screwed up in tears and desperation, his heartbeat pounding against his chest, a cold fist tying the knot in his stomach harder and harder.

"Three," Damian laughed gleefully.

"Oh...I gotta get the door. It's Chris. You're breaking up."

Tears were falling freely now and Peter gripped the phone, "Don't get the door, please-"

"Two."

"No, May, don't!" Peter screamed desperately into the phone, his voice cracking and breaking. "Don't open the door, please, May, no! MAY!"

"One."

Peter heard the door open, and his Aunt's voice rang out one last time before she suddenly stopped. *"Hey Chris, can-"*

"May, I love you, I'm so so sorry," Peter cried, pressing a fist to his head. "Please no-"

"Bang," Damian giggled maniacally.

"NO!" Peter screamed.

The gunshot almost made Peter drop the phone.

He flinched, hard.

Natasha put a hand to her mouth, gasping.

Steve cursed, spinning and kicking over the nearest thing which happened to be the first aid kit which spilled over the floor.

Tony stood somehow, his expression crumpling with shock, pain, and horror. His gaze found Peter's and provided comfort, but it wasn't enough.

Peter opened his mouth to scream and found he couldn't. Instead he let out a groan of pain, as something inside of him was ruthlessly torn out of his chest.

A shock ran through his spine all the way down to his feet and Peter sucked in a breath through his nose, letting it out in a shaking exhale that resembled a broken sob.

Then he stared straight ahead, at Tony, before hanging his head to his chest as the fight left him. All air was suddenly pulled out of his lungs and Peter wanted to crumple to his knees but he didn't even have the strength to unlock his legs. He stayed standing in shock, tears streaming down his cheeks. His hands were shaking and he couldn't breathe properly.

"Well...that was fun," Damian said happily, his voice a low drawl as Peter heard rocks falling and fire crackling. The man's voice was tinged with pain as he let out his last words across the phone. *"Bye...Peter."*

The phone call ended abruptly and the line went dead.

Damian clicked the phone shut with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. The pain was starting to kick in once he let it; there was no reason to fight anymore. He felt the fire now as it slowly inched up his leg, burning his skin, but he was fine with it. He had done his job. He had broken Peter Parker. The man blinked once as the ceiling shifted.

He narrowed his eyes and smirked, practically daring it to fall.

It complied, the world crashing down on him. The man sank into his sea of blood, like he and Tony had predicted, finally drowning.

Damian's eyes remained open, blood trickling from the side of his head, his body covered in rocks and dust.

Tony was breathing hard, watching in shock, anger, and utter horror. Peter's shaking hand slowly dropped from his ear. In a rage, the kid suddenly gripped it and slammed the phone as hard as he could against the ground where it shattered, breaking into a hundred pieces. Peter clutched at his stomach and then gagged, fighting the sudden urge to throw up. He let out a sound that Tony didn't know anyone was capable of making as he put his hands around his head. It was a choked cry full of defeat and rage and sadness.

The kid stared at the ground, his shoulders racked with sobs as he pushed both wrists to his head, nails digging into his palms so hard Tony swore he was going to draw blood. Peter looked up at

Tony, and the look he gave him...

Tony's face fell more than he thought was possible and his heart was clenched with a cold fist. 'No' Peter mouthed, tears spilling from his eyes as his shoulders shook with heartbreaking sobs and cries of pain torn from his throat.

Tony surged forward, pushing Nat and Steve's arms away in haste to get to his kid. Peter didn't even look up as he reached him, staggering. Tony practically crashed into him and Peter leaned forward, simply putting his forehead to Tony's chest, trembling. The man limped a bit closer and moved a steady hand to clasp the back of his neck, a thumb rubbing his hair. He tugged the kid as close as he would allow, his other hand pressed to his wound, the pain keeping him from passing out from exhaustion.

Tony took a shaky breath, Peter still crying against his chest, his arms limp at his sides, tears dropping to the ground between them. Tony, who was now crying as well, lowered his chin to rest on Peter's head.

"No," Peter cried weakly; that was the first thing he could painfully wrench from his throat. His hand reached up and fisted Tony's sleeve firmly as he spoke harshly, *"No."*

Tony opened his mouth to speak and then closed it as his shirt was winded tighter in Peter's fingers for comfort. Nothing could be said. There was nothing he could say to fix this, to make this better. May was dead. Damian had had her killed while on the phone with her nephew. If the man wasn't already dead, Tony would have gone back into the burning building just to make him pay for what he did. But Peter needed him.

That was also the only reason he was staying conscious. The pain had kicked in now, the adrenaline gone. He had been about to pass out on the ramp right before Peter got the call, but the minute the boy looked up with those wide and fearful eyes, his face contorting to that of pain, Tony was alert.

With the kid leaning against his chest, Tony held his ground, his wound sending rippling fiery pain throughout his whole body, turning his vision a blinding white. He grit his teeth; this was nothing compared to what Peter felt. And so he stayed quiet, afraid if he opened his mouth and said the wrong thing, or if he worsened the situation by letting out a cry of pain.

He couldn't believe it. May. Gone. Seeing Peter like this was the only thing that kept him standing for as long as he did, tears running down his own cheeks for the kid's aunt that he had considered a friend, even family. Peter had tied them together, and now....now she was gone.

Tony held out as long as he could, he really did, and they stayed there for quite some time, long enough for the Avengers to all gather. No one said it too loudly so that Peter didn't have to hear it, but Tony watched their mouths move and slowly every single team member figured out what happened. They stood in a sad circle, paying their respects with bowed heads, to the woman who had visited the compound and definitely made an impression on all of them.

Peter was utterly defeated, the sobs not stopping or slowing, tears soaking the top of Tony's shirt. Peter was cradling his broken arm to his chest and his grip on Tony's sleeve hadn't loosened. Tony clasped the back of Peter's neck firmly and rubbed the kid's curls, closing his eyes and laying his cheek against the boy's head.

"I'm so sorry kid," he whispered quietly, unsure if Peter heard him.

But a minute later, Tony was having trouble standing, having trouble seeing. Then, against his

stubborn will, he couldn't fight it anymore. Tony looked backward at Steve who caught his eye in sudden urgency, and Tony motioned to Peter. Then his eyes rolled up in the back of his head. His knees buckled, his head slipping to Peter's shoulder as he collapsed, but he never hit the ground.

Tony blacked out for a little bit, his vision tunneling with white hot pain but when he came to he felt Peter tucked under his arm, taking the majority of his weight and not letting anyone else touch them as he walked up the ramp. Tony realized the kid was probably the one who had caught him in the first place and he made a noise of protest and guilt- not wanting to tear Peter away from his mourning.

He was supposed to comfort the kid.

Protect the kid.

Especially now.

When he was hurt.

When he was broken.

Yet, now it was completely the opposite.

Another layer of guilt settled on his shoulders and Tony felt tears come to his eyes for the pain the kid was in, the pain that he was just adding onto.

"I've lost one family member today," Peter said quietly, tears still trickling down his cheeks as he helped Tony onto the jet with the Avengers. He tightened his grip on Tony and spoke firmly, "I'm not losing two."

14 Hours Later

Tony opened his eyes and winced, squinting in the harsh light. He licks his lips and takes a breath as big as his lungs will allow him, before exhaling shakily. Well he can breathe. That's a start. He turns his head and finds himself staring at a mop of messy brown hair.

Peter's in a chair next to the hospital bed with his head resting against the covers. He's got one hand on Tony's knee, another hand barely touching his fingers. Tony moves his good arm forward; his bad one is in a sling, and he goes to gently ruffle the boy's curls until he wakes up, before he's reminded of the sting of the three months. Sure, he had ruffled the kid's hair recently, but they had been kidnapped, tortured, and in life or death situations. Rules were different now. They were different. And Tony didn't want to screw anything up. So instead he squeezes Peter's hand.

The kid jolts awake immediately, squeezing it back out of instinct, and then his eyes find Tony. Relief floods his gaze and his shoulders lower, tension rolling off in waves. He manages a smile and croaks, "Hi."

His eyes are red and bloodshot and there's a wet patch on the sheet where he had been laying. It pains Tony to know the kid could have cried himself to sleep. But Tony can't say any of this- or more accurately, he won't. Because Peter has every right to be mad at him, and they haven't even begun to discuss the past three months. So naturally, he turns to humor.

"Is this the part when you say I shouldn't call and that we should go our separate ways?" Tony jokes weakly.

Peter's lip curls into an almost smile and he looks down, letting go of Tony's hand to adjust his matching sling. His expression darkens and Peter scratches the back of his head. "It is ironically similar, isn't it?"

Tony gives him a sad smile, and then waits hesitantly for an answer, meeting Peter's eyes with a timid look. He feels guilty needing confirmation, same way as he felt guilty that he had even given thought to Peter leaving him for dead. Tony couldn't believe how hurtfully accurate that sentence was: Three months did a lot, didn't it?

But somehow, like usual, Peter seems to understand and he shakes his head, "No, you're stuck with me."

Tony breathes a sigh of relief which he figures out is audible to his dismay and he rolls his eyes at Peter's smirk of acknowledgment. "Don't give me that," he chuckles. Peter cuts the smile and Tony glances at him, whispering softly, "Are you okay, kid?"

Peter looks up with tears in his eyes that he furiously wipes with the back of his good hand. The boy takes a breath. "No," he laughs, furiously shaking his head and trying to smile somehow. "No, no I'm not okay."

Tony's chest aches at his reaction, and he suddenly wishes he had never asked. He never wanted to see Peter in pain, and being in that place he had been shown more than he wanted, enough for a lifetime. Turns out, despite being rescued and home, it almost seemed as if the pain was worse.

Peter's grin both fails and falls and the boy squeezes his eyes shut, lowering his head, his shoulders shaking as an attempt to compose himself. "But...I will be. I guess. Can we- can we change the subject, I-"

It's Tony who understands this time, because he does it too. The smile- no that's too general: The cocky grin. The confidence. The facade that saves him every time, except when he's being reminded of it. Peter needs to desperately turn his attention to something else.

"Well, you want to tell me my diagnosis?" Tony suggests.

Peter coughs, clearing his throat and straightening in the seat, wiping his eyes, "Uh- yeah. Ok. The doctor said they got the bullet out and you'll be fine once it heals. Nasty scar though. You've got a broken bone in your arm, don't ask me which one."

"Which one?" Tony asked innocently.

"I just said don't ask me which one," Peter said, and Tony caught a faint hint of a smile. He took his small victory. The boy continued, "That same shoulder has also got a stab wound and a bullet graze but those were kind of connected, a few broken ribs, concussion, exhaustion, dehydration, stab wound in your thigh, and then...well, you know where all the cuts and bruises are."

Tony made a face and raised his eyebrows before motioning forward, "What about you?"

"What about me?" Peter asked in confusion.

"What's your list?" Tony questioned, thinking it was obvious. Many times had they both been hurt, one look would be enough to signal the other to start listing where they were injured. It had become a system they had, usually at the med bay, one that they just started without even speaking. It was simply a look, *then*. Now, words weren't even enough.

Peter scoffed, "It's not a competition."

"No, it's not," Tony agreed instantly, knitting his eyebrows as he realized Peter had no idea what he was talking about. "I want to know if you're okay, that's all. We used to...list them out...you know?"

"Oh." Peter seemed slightly shocked, not that Tony was worried about him, but that he hadn't thought of that. "Y-yeah, I'm fine," he stuttered, looking down in slight embarrassment. Tony winced, because he hadn't even begun to describe what was wrong; he had just brushed it off and said he was fine. Peter realized his mistake and winced as well, mumbling to try and retrace his words, "Same stuff as yours, minus the bullet wound, and then just some electrical burns and a healing ankle."

Tony turned his gaze to the ground, trying to ignore the sting in his chest. He spoke quietly, not daring to meet the kid's eyes at that moment, "I guess we're both rusty, huh?"

Peter leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath, suddenly interested in the floor, "Guess so."

Tony winces and takes a small breath, "Peter I-"

"Don't want to hear it," Peter snaps, cutting him off.

Tony frowns, "What?"

Peter meets his eyes and shakes his head firmly. "You're gonna say you're sorry and I don't want to hear it. Not right now at least. We have a lot to talk about. But I really don't want to do it now."

"I don't want to either, of course not," Tony assures him firmly. "I just want you to know-"

"I know," Peter nods. "Tony, you took a bullet for me and were ready to die so that I could get out of that hell hole- trust me, I know."

Tony was taken back by his little outburst but he took his word for it, "Okay. Okay, kid."

"Damian's dead," Peter says quietly. "A search team found his body. Toomes was in the building that collapsed so he's dead too; there were no survivors. The other Raft prisoners cut their ties and are just...out, so that's great," he sighs. He wipes his nose, his hand starting to shake and he rushes the next sentence, Tony understanding why. "They also found the team assigned to...protect May...all dead. I heard Steve talking. We rushed you to the hospital once we got you on the jet."

"Thanks," Tony said quietly.

Peter blinked, staring at the ground, his voice cracking, "We lost you once, you know that?" The kid bit his cheek and rubbed his hair, clearing his throat, his knee suddenly bouncing. "Heart just stopped," he tried to smile and failed. "Bruce had to bring you back. On the plane."

"Oh," Tony said quietly. "Were you...okay?"

Peter scoffed, "What kind of question is that?" he muttered seriously, blinking tears out of his eyes before he smirked. "Was I okay, I mean yeah, I thought of how much quieter the lab would be, which was a nice thought and how I could take your office. Maybe paint the walls green. And then your heart had to start beating again," he joked, but Tony could hear the pain and fear in his words.

The kid struggled to tell Tony how scared he was, to fully and accurately describe how terrified and worried he had been, how he had thought for a split second, that he would be losing all the family he had ever had in under an hour. Of course he didn't say that out loud, but Tony got it.

He was also hung up on something else, that started mending the shattered glass wall between

them.

"I hate green," Tony smirked.

"I know you do," Peter grins quickly, his eyes sparking for a quick second before the mischievous flame is extinguished. Once again, Tony took his small victory. Peter still remembered that. "No, no, I wasn't okay. I thought I would lose both people I cared about more than anything in the world in a day."

Tony straightened at that and if Peter had met his eyes he would have seen the impact of those words. The kid rubbed his nose and clasped his hand on his knee, "But...you're here now. So, it's fine," he shrugged, "I guess."

"Has the team asked what happened in there?" Tony asked quietly.

Peter shook his head, "No. They wanted us both to be here." Just then the kid's eyes scrunched up and he stifled a yawn, shaking his head and digging his nails into his palms, blinking harshly. Tony did that whenever he wanted to stay awake. He wouldn't watch the kid do it.

Tony raised an eyebrow, "Peter, how long have you been here?"

"Since you got out of surgery. So for a little over 11 hours, why?" Peter asked.

"You need to sleep," Tony said firmly.

"No," Peter snapped dangerously.

"Kid, I mean it," Tony said weakly.

"So do I!" Peter yelled furiously, actually getting out of his chair. It scraped against the ground and Tony winced. Peter looked around to make sure no one had seen the outburst before he wiped his eyes and sank back down into the chair in defeat, his voice trembling. "Tony, I- I can't sleep. I hear that...*gunshot* every couple of minutes or I- I- hear you screaming, or myself screaming, and I just- I'm so tired," he whimpered, his hands shaking. He pressed his palms to his head, his tone adding another layer of depth and sadness Tony hadn't thought possible.

"And I can't go back to the apartment, I just can't- I don't know if I ever can-" Peter ducked his head into his lap and ran his hands through his hair. "It's fine. It's fine. I'm fine." He put his hand against his knee and stood, pointing to the door and surging forward. "I'll just go, I think there's a chair in the hallway, I know you need to sleep-"

Tony winced at the kid's pain and he immediately called him back, "Peter."

"Yeah?" Peter whispered brokenly, stopping in his tracks and looking at him hopefully.

Tony desperately searched for the right thing to say, something that was meaningful, that could recall a moment somehow, that could bring back a fond memory. Or a word they used, or something he had said to him while in that hell hole that gave the kid hope, and most importantly, that would explain what he wanted to say to make the kid stay.

What he wanted to say was that he couldn't lose the kid again, even if that meant him leaving the room for the hallway. Tony couldn't bear the thought of him going out of his reach let alone his sight. Stay, he thought, because I won't be able to sleep either. Because he had been awake while Peter screamed from the pitch whenever his head dropped to his chest. He had been holding Peter in his arms while he bled out from the Goblin's hoverboard. He had been there when he was

unlocking Peter's cuffs. He had been there when Peter squirmed on the ground, letting out choked yells as Damian jabbed the cattle prod into his stomach. He had been there when the man ruthlessly kicked him in the stomach, making the teenager whimper. He had been there to see the look on Peter's face and watch him flinch as a gunshot echoed through the phone loud enough that even he could hear it.

Tony realized that he needed Peter as much as he hoped Peter needed him. The kid was broken, and Tony was supposed to be there for him. That was his job. He was supposed to protect him, but he was afraid that Peter wouldn't want his protection anymore. It wasn't like he had proven it. Taking a bullet hadn't made up for the fact that the kid, the closest thing he had to a son had been tortured, kicked, electrocuted, cut, all while Tony watched. He had let that happen. And he had let this happen too. Why should Peter stay? Because Tony wanted him to? That was selfish.

Tony had let himself walk out of those doors three months ago, and had made the worst mistake of his life. He had left his son behind, to protect him, and he had nearly gotten him killed. He had caused all of this, and Peter had no reason to accept his apology that he hadn't even officially said. And now, here was a second chance to protect him, to apologize, to show Peter that he was wrong, that he was sorry, and that he meant everything to him. The kid had lost his aunt for gosh sakes. No kid, especially not Peter, who was the purest kid in the world, should ever have to go through that. Tony had failed him once before, and he wouldn't fail him again.

So please, stay, because you mean more to me than anything and I am so, so sorry. And you don't have to forgive me, I don't expect you to. Especially not right now. But I ask that you give me a chance because I have spent three months being lost without you, because like it or not, we need each other. Or at least I need you. I don't know if you need me, or want my help, but I do want you to stay. Let me do at least one thing right.

All of those words flashed through Tony's head in less than a second, yet he still hadn't voiced a single one, or even opened his mouth. How to say all of that? Tony searched and searched in desperation for only a quick second more; he heard a quiet voice and his vision focused.

"Okay," Peter said quietly, giving him a small smile, tears glistening in his eyes as he slowly crossed back over and pulled the chair to Tony's side. "Thanks, Tony." The kid laid his head down and Tony instinctively rested his arm upon his shoulders, smiling through his happy surprise. Peter was in shock, too tired, too exhausted to cry anymore.

The kid's voice was muffled but as he inched closer he whispered, "I need you too."

Tony's breath caught in his throat. He was sure he hadn't said anything out loud. Before all of this, they had taken pride in their ability to communicate through looks, to speak without actually speaking. They had just done it.

Tony didn't know how to respond to that, and Peter's eyes were already closed, his head leaning softly against Tony's side, the man's arm draped around his shoulders. He slowly moved his hand to Peter's head, watching for a reaction, waiting for Peter to sit up and glare before storming out. It was quite the opposite. The kid's shoulders relaxed and a tear slipped down Peter's cheek.

Tony sank backward into the bed and his hand unconsciously combed through Peter's curls as he felt the kid fist his sleeve with his other hand.

Heyyyyy so don't kill me :) Please :) I would gratefully appreciate it. I feel like I've been saying that a lot. Well you guys signed on for angst and hopefully I delivered. Peter is totally distraught the poor kid and he and Tony have still seriously got to talk, and now that were back to 'normal' and its not life and death situations, its gonna be a lil awkward with the team until we talk it out with them...

you get the point. we're far from over here <3 But hopefully this pulled at your heart strings and was a good crazy conclusion to this whole mess. Loose ends will all be tied up, not to fear, and we've got a few more surprises in store :)

Thank you guys so much for reading and please please please drop a comment, tell me what you thought, i absolutely love hearing from you guys. And stay tuned! Next chapter ASAP, probs 4-5 days.

I love you all 3000 <3

Stitches

Chapter Notes

Hellloooooooo lovely readers! I hope you all are doing well and having a wonderful day :) I have a new chapter for you and it is LIT. I had such a blast writing it and hope you enjoy reading it. The response to the last one was just- omg absolutely insane??? Thank you guys for your support and encouragement, you all make my day constantly and I appreciate every single one of you. This chapter is fun, we're in line for the recovery ride and it's about to start! Tony and Peter are trying to work things out, but there are a few loops being thrown and as always, some angst because hello...have u met me? ANYWAY I hope you all enjoy, and are staying healthy, and enjoying summer!! This is a crazy time and I am so thankful that I can come on here and have an awesome time writing for you guys :)
Now I am off to get some coffee XD, enjoy the read!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was a loud crash in the hallway; someone had bumped an idle hospital bed and it had hit the corner, someone dropping their clipboard in the middle of the floor as a result. Peter and Tony both snapped awake in a panic, breathing hard, eyes shooting open in similar fear. Flashbacks of the past couple days shocked them to their core, and the man and boy blinked them away, hearts clenching.

The woman in the hallway laughed and helped the nurse move the bed and both Tony and Peter went to run a hand through their hair only to find that they had both fisted each other's sleeves. Avoiding glances, they both let go and Peter pushed his chair back, taking a shaky breath and glancing at the clock. They had only managed about 20 minutes of sleep, but it was something, and it was as close to peaceful as either of them had gotten for the past three months, even though they wouldn't admit it. Neither wanted to go back to sleep and both were shaking.

"Fun times," Peter muttered, clearing his throat, shifting in his seat uncomfortably.

Tony took a deep sigh with raised eyebrows as he coughed out, "Yeah."

Peter's gaze flicked to Tony's side and he motioned forward, "How- how are you feeling?" It hadn't been that long, but neither knew how to start a normal conversation, so they resulted to small talk. But little did they know, it spoke words; their first instinct was to make sure the other was okay.

Tony made a face. He was in a lot of pain, but he knew he was already pumped with enough painkillers and he didn't want to worry Peter. He smirked, "Like I got shot." Peter gave him a look, that Tony had missed. He couldn't help but smile a little before he pointed with his good hand, "How about you? You got it worse anyway."

Peter shrugged as well as he could with one arm, "I heal faster, so better than you." He looked around nervously, "But when I get a check up the doc is gonna be baffled."

"What you mean? People heal from broken arms in less than three weeks all the time," Tony grinned.

Peter gave him a look, "This is your fault, you know. If your heart hadn't stopped we would have

made it back to the med bay at the compound. Instead, we're in this place where people ask questions because they don't know I'm Spiderman," he grumbled. "And the coffee sucks."

"Oh I'm so sorry," Tony drawled, knowing the kid was joking. Then he rubbed his chin, "Coffee does sound good though. Even if it sucks."

"Yeah, nu uh," Peter pats his knee before he grips the arms of the chair to stand. "You need to sleep. Doctor's orders," he said firmly. "I'll get some coffee of my own though, that does sound good," he agrees.

"You brat," Tony hissed affectionately and Peter scoffed in mock surprise.

Just then there was a knock and they both looked over their shoulder, Peter about to get up and open it before the knob turns and the door bursts open. Avengers came surging through in a huge clamor of shoving, curses, and exclamations. Tony grinned at Peter, "So much for sleep."

Steve got in first, shoving Bucky away since they had both fallen into each other trying to get through the doorway at the same time. "Hey, Tones!"

"Star spangled idiot," Tony greeted him, sitting up as best he could in the hospital bed. "I can't believe I'm saying it, but I'm, once again, glad to see you."

"I did save your life," Steve smirked, slipping his hands in his jean pockets. "Remember that."

Wanda smirked, standing next to Vision, "Way to take credit for a group effort, Steve."

"I owe you an official thank you," Tony said, reaching out and shaking Steve's hand with a genuine smile. "To all of you guys. Thanks." He nodded to his friends who smiled back.

"Hey, pretending we need you really brings the team together," Natasha joked, walking over and giving him a hug. "For the record, I did miss you. No one put Clint in his place."

"So obviously I'm super glad to see you back," Clint groaned, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. Tony grinned.

"The compound is taken care of. No survivors. We sent in a SHIELD squad," Rhodey said firmly, shaking Tony's hand and clasp his good shoulder with a smile.

Peter scoffed from his seat, frowning, "Yeah, because they do their job." His voice cracked with emotion, rendering everyone silent.

They hadn't really gotten a chance to talk to Peter much. When he had been on the jet his main concern was Tony, who he didn't let out of his sight and kept talking to to try and keep him awake. Nat and Steve were the two people who calmed him down when Tony's heart gave out. But when they got to the hospital he hadn't said much, just surrendered to having his arm set and casted, nodded and answered yes or no questions and was whisked away to be checked out by the doctor. Then, soon after that, he snuck out and sat in the waiting room for Tony's surgery- the team going crazy trying to find him. Steve somehow knew exactly where he was. After that he had moved into Tony's room and no one dared enter after Peter put his head down and fell asleep with his hand on the man's arm.

But now the kid spoke, and it was a relief for all of the Avengers behind him, even if the voice was choked in sadness and despair. He wasn't wrong. The same men who were sent to protect May were the same they sent in to oversee the clean up and search of the destroyed warehouses. They hadn't exactly followed through the first time.

"I'm sorry, kid," Steve said quietly, his voice quiet. "We all are," he continued, placing a hand on Peter's shoulder. The kid nodded, his knee starting to bounce against the carpet. "We- we can have a funeral as soon as a week, if that's okay with you." Peter again nodded silently and a cloud of grief settled among the room.

Peter, of all people, broke it. "Tony's right you know," he said over his shoulder. "We do owe you all a thank you. Although a bit sooner would have been nice," he joked.

"Tell us about it," Bruce scoffed, giving him a weak smile. "We were just as pissed."

"Damian made it nearly impossible to find you," Sam sighed in annoyance, scratching his neck. "It was like you guys dissappeared into thin air."

"Well now we're back. When can we get out of his dumb hospital?" Tony demanded, looking around in distaste at the room. He knew he could make it out with the help of a suit and a bit of his own tech, and then he could be in the med bay of the compound where both he and Peter would be better treated. He made a face as he glanced, mumbling, "I don't even like the windows."

Natasha scoffed and crossed her arms, "You got shot, Tony. A gunshot wound mandates they have to keep you for 7 to 8 days."

Silence. Everyone looked at Tony, waiting for some retort, which he had ready. Tony frowned and raised an eyebrow, "But...I'm Tony Stark."

"I guess we're leaving tonight," Natasha changed her answer, clasping her hands with a sigh. "I'll speak with the doctor. Rhodey, you mind coming with?"

Rhodey nodded, starting forward after giving Tony a small salute, "Yeah."

"I think we all should go, actually," Steve said, looking back and forth at Peter and Tony. His gaze settled on the younger of the two, who met his eyes, Natasha and Rhodey stopping before they could walk through the door. "Peter, what we did..." he shakes his head and looks down, "it can't be excused. And we need to have that talk- *you* need to have that talk. And we all need to listen. But right now, I don't think..." Steve blinked and shifted his feet, "I *know* you don't want to have that talk right now, and I'm sure we're the last people you want to see..."

Steve smirks, "But you won't say any of that because you are too good of a kid." Tony looks at Peter with a small smile, the kid watching Cap intently. Steve's voice is genuine and he turns his gaze to his best friend as he continues, "Peter, we don't deserve to be forgiven. But..." Steve looked up weakly, "I speak for the whole team when I say we sure would like a second chance."

Peter met his eyes but said nothing.

Natasha spoke, the Avengers moving so that he could see her through the rest of the team, and Tony exchanged thankful nods with Steve when he took a step back. "We don't expect that right away either," she assured him. "You need time. And we need you to be okay, so if you need us, we will be there. I can promise you that. But we can all take a hint, at least for the last few hours we have to spend at this hospital. And you deserve to get your bearings, either with or without us, your choice."

"Okay. Okay." Peter nods slowly in agreement, because she was right. He wasn't in the mood to talk about anything with them, whether that was about what happened three months ago or three days ago. Peter turns and looks at Tony, tossing his head, "That means you too buddy. Get out."

Tony shoots him a look, recognizing the joke, and fake smiles, "Yeah, let me just *wheel* my own

hospital bed out. Give me a second to find the gas pedal."

Peter smirks and looks back at the team, sobering his expression and speaking sincerely, "Thanks guys. I mean it. And, um...don't go too far, okay? You're the..." his voice got even quieter till it was almost a whisper, "only family I've got left."

Everyone straightens in pride at that. Bucky gives him a warm smile, "We'll be right around the corner kid."

"Literally," Vision adds as they start to head towards the door.

"We found a vending machine with Gummy Bears and KitKats two hallways down," Clint explains, winking at Peter who laughs.

The Avengers all file out and he and Tony watch until the door closes. Then the man looks over at Peter, brushing his arm and asking seriously, "So why wasn't I kicked out? I started this mess. I would have figured I would have been the last person you would want to see, especially now." He was looking down in shame so he missed Peter's wince.

The boy sinks into the chair, adjusting his sling, "I-" he pauses, not even starting his sentence. He takes a deep breath and looks up timidly. Then he says, "This would require us having the talk."

"The three month talk," Tony says slowly.

Peter scratches his knee and then runs his hand through his hair, "Yeah. That talk."

Tony sits there uncomfortable, "Do you...want to have that talk?"

Peter looks up at him after a second of silence and there are tears in his eyes, shocking Tony. "I don't know." Before Tony can pry the kid breaks, spluttering, "I'm afraid if we do it's gonna be like last time and we're both gonna say stuff we don't mean and then what if I don't stop you if you walk about again-" Peter sobbed. "Because I wanted to stop you- I'm sorry I didn't stop you-"

"I'm sorry for walking out," Tony cuts him off weakly.

Peter meets his eyes, a tear spilling down his cheek as he shakes his head, "So I can't have that happen again, not now. Not today," he swears. "I can't handle you walking out again-"

"I won't," Tony cuts him off. He gives him a weak smile, "I *can't*."

Peter looks up in hope, "You *can't* walk out on me?"

"Yeah, physically, I can't. I can't walk."

"Oh God," Peter groans.

"Or at least I haven't tried it," Tony admits. "So that would be a really awesome storm out. Get up, take one step, and fall flat on my face. I'd have to do some sort of one armed army crawl and that would be pathetic," he snorts, "and then there's the whole...getting the door open? A lot of," he tries to demonstrate his range of motion in his good arm, "contortion. So I'd hope you would stop me, for my own sake."

Peter was laughing through his tears and he put his hand on his forehead, "God, you always have to turn it into a joke."

"Don't judge me," Tony smirks, chuckling quietly. "You do it too. And...yeah. I haven't seen that

idiotic grin in three months." Tony looks down in guilt, his voice losing its energy, "And that was my fault. So...I'll take a small victory." He looks up, meeting Peter's eyes and promising, "I will never. *Ever*. Walk out." He shakes his head firmly, "Ever again. So if you want to have that talk, I am ready to have that talk. And if you don't want to have it just yet, I understand that too."

"I..." Peter mumbles quietly, his eyebrows knitting as he stares intently at the floor. "I- Tony, I don't know what I want." He acts like this is a crime and puts his head in his hand, squeezing his eyes shut.

"That's okay too," Tony assures him, reaching a hand out to brush his shoulder, before recoiling, unsure if physical contact was still the way to calm him down after all these months.

"No," Peter looks up, shaking his head in fury, oblivious to Tony's attempt to put his hand on his shoulder. "No, no it's not. It's not okay. I should know. I shouldn't be like this-

"Peter," Tony says sharply and the kid's budding panic attack is nipped before it can even start. He doesn't know what to say, because there's too much. So he says it with his gaze. And he hopes it works again. It does. The kid nods and stands, wincing only slightly.

"Yeah. I guess," he says, answering the question Tony asked him through his eyes without even blinking. "I- I'm gonna get that coffee, okay?" Peter says, pointing to the door and rubbing a hand over his messy hair .

Tony gives him a small smile and winks, "I take mine black."

"I know how you take your coffee, Tony," Peter rolls his eyes, missing Tony's expression of pure joy that he remembered such a small detail as he turns around. "And for thinking I would forget that, you're getting two sugars in it," he says with a smirk, Tony groaning behind him as he turns the knob.

"I hate sugar," Tony says angrily.

"Fine, one," Peter compromises.

"Be careful," Tony instinctively says as the boy opens the door. He immediately bites his tongue, wincing at his words. It's silly. They're in a hospital. There are no bad guys waiting for him down the hall. It's a dumb and ridiculous thing to say, but to Peter it somehow makes sense because he looks Tony directly in the eye and nods.

After what happened, Tony wasn't exactly ready to let the kid out of his sight, even if it was only a hallway down. They had been separated one too many times, and Peter had been hurt because of him one too many times. The past couple days Tony had been tied up, physically restrained. That stopped him from getting to his kid, from protecting him. Now he was still confined to the room as far as he knew; he hadn't tested his legs or bullet wound yet, and he was letting Peter out of his sight again, willingly.

"Hey," Peter says quietly, snapping him out of his thoughts. Tony looks up and he must have a scared look in his eyes because the kid gives him a firm nod again, "I'm gonna be fine. Be back in two seconds."

"It's not like I'm worried about you," Tony grumbled.

Peter smirked, "Tony, we're out of the room. There's no camera and mic on us, you can drop the act."

Tony gives him a smile and shakes his head, "Oh, shut up."

Peter closes the door softly before he turns to walk down to the coffee machine which is on the other end of their hallway. The minute there's a barrier between him and Tony, he feels a million times worse. He suddenly feels nauseous, the hallway a bit brighter as he squints. Peter makes it to the station in the hospital, literally slumping against the wall.

After pushing a hand against his head, as if that would clear the aching and ringing, he reaches and grabs two cups, starting to fill one up with hot water. The room is slightly spinning and Peter feels his eyes sting, another wave of tears coming, like he had felt when he ran to hide in the waiting room for Tony's surgery. It had been the one place he had felt safe, the one place where he felt closest to the person who he had been through hell with.

He grit his teeth and clenched his hand into a fist, digging his nails into his palm as he took deep breaths, slowly and furiously unwinding the budding knot in his stomach. He forcefully swallowed the lump in his throat and bit his lip, sucking in a breath harshly through his nose as he blinked away the hot tears.

Come on, Peter, keep it together.

Part of him felt like he shouldn't, because he had just lost his aunt- another knot in his stomach started to form and Peter cursed into his chest, adjusting his footing. If there was one thing he learned, it was that he was Spiderman even without the suit-

Peter's heart dropped to his stomach. His suit had probably been burned as well. A pit formed in his gut and Peter felt a gross taste in his mouth, a tingle running down his spine as if he had just lost part of his identity. No, he told himself, Tony told you. If you're nothing without the suit, then you shouldn't have it. Peter would make a new one. And Spiderman was brave, he was everything Peter Parker couldn't be. And right now, he couldn't break. He would never break.

And then someone's phone rang in the room next to him. Peter's head snapped up and a shiver ran down his spine as he swallowed forcefully. He shoved his hand into his pocket and took a deep breath.

"Hi Pete."

He knew that voice. He hated that voice.

"No. No you're-"

"Dead? In about one minute, yes. This is my call. I get one phone call before I go away for life. Isn't that the law?"

Peter slams his hand onto the counter, his eyes shooting open. He takes a gasping breath and blinks, forcing his tears back as he pulled out the cup that was ready. He dropped a sugar in, which provided him with a little comfort at the thought of Tony. Then, desperate to stay focused, he used every ounce of concentration to fill the other cup with hot water.

Then there came a voice from the other hallway, rough and demanding. Peter already hated it. He knew it was someone who worked for the government before he even turned, probably in a suit too.

"Let me through. Now. I don't have time for this. You're lucky I don't report you to your

supervisor. Unbelievable."

Peter looks to his left and sees men with suits walking towards him, just as he predicted. He frowns and continues what he's doing, trying to ignore the commotion they're causing with the nearby desk. He can barely hold his cup he's shaking so hard but suddenly he has to compose himself because they're walking towards him and not stopping. Yet, their gaze was focused on him. Peter's lucky day. And they just asked him a question- at least the guy in front did.

"Are you Peter Parker?"

Peter takes a deep breath, clenches his good hand, forces a smile, goes over what he had just forced himself to- *convinced* himself to accept and straightens, turning to the side with a cocky expression, "No. I'm Rick Springfield, how can I help you, hot shot?"

The man's expression darkens and he folds his hands in front of his chest, "My name is Michael, I'm a social worker for-

"Can I see some form of ID?" Peter interrupts him, raising his eyebrows. The man sighs in annoyance and disbelief before he reaches into his coat and pulls out his badge, flipping it front of Peter before he can even get a good look. Then he recoils his arm, shoving it back into his pocket. Peter blinks, "I'm Spiderman, not the flash. Can I *see* the ID?"

The man looks at his coworkers, "The kid is hilarious." He tosses his badge towards Peter who catches it without even looking, before glancing at the badge.

"Michael huh? You don't like your first name," Peter snickers, squinting, "Kerry?"

The man snarls and snatches the badge back, "You can call me Michael, Mr. Parker."

"Ok, Kerry," Peter nods seriously. "What do you want? Please don't tell me you're sorry for my loss, because you're full of crap. I thought you guys were supposed to be nice?"

Kerry ignores him and pulls out a folder, "16. Home in Queens, New York. Father, deceased. Mother, deceased. Uncle, recently deceased."

Peter bits his lip and manages to maintain his composure. "Wow, thanks for listing off the members of my dead family, really appreciate that- hey, question, why don't you get that stick taken out?"

"Aunt...May Parker," Kerry continues before he pauses and looks at Peter who is fuming and ten seconds away from killing the man in front of him, especially when Kerry fakes a frown and whispers, "I'm sorry for your loss-"

"Woah. Two sticks. We are in a hospital, I'm sure they could remove both of them for you and you can be back being an annoying bastard in no time," Peter says firmly, gritting his teeth.

The man skims the folder some more, biting his lip as he sighs, "Point being, no existing kin."

"Yeah, I got that," Peter snaps dangerously, "I would punch you if my arm wasn't in a sling."

"And no emergency contacts," Kerry finishes, slamming the manila folder shut.

"Did you just slam a *folder*, a manila folder, just to be dramatic?" Peter scoffs before he frowns in confusion. "And no...no, no, that's a mistake. I have an emergency contact. My emergency contact is..." Peter's face falls. It was after the phone call with Natasha.

Peter hung up the phone and then got to his feet, walking over to the edge of his closet and bending to slip on his mask, blinking away the tears. "Karen?" His voice shook. "Delete and block all the Avengers from my phone, ok? And anything related to Stark Industries."

"Are you sure, Peter? You cannot undo this action."

Peter hesitates. Then he licks his lips and nods, clearing his throat, "Yes. Yes, all of it. GPS, everything. And do me a favor...can you...forget it too?"

Peter curses under his breath, "Crap."

"As of now, you have no legal guardian, which means that you are now under the protection of the government until we can find you a home," Kerry says, crossing his arms against his chest. He wasn't going to let him walk away, unless Peter was already walking and then he had to catch up. If he could just make it back to Tony's room...

"Oh joy, I'm saved," Peter says, making a plan in seconds. He takes the cup of coffee and reaches for the other one which is just filled with steaming water, purposely knocking it over. The hot water spills across the counter and drips to the floor, the man stumbling back a few feet to avoid getting it on his shoes. It provides Peter the few feet to slip through to the hallway he needs, and the second delay that gives him a head start. With a satisfied smile, he starts to slowly walk back towards Tony's room, looking over his shoulder at the men who he sees are following him a couple steps behind.

"Mr. Parker, we would like you to come with us," Kerry said again, as if he didn't hear him the first time as Peter rounded the corner.

"I'm not deaf, I heard you," Peter frowned and shrugged, trying to walk faster to get back to the room, coffee threatening to spill over the lip of the cup. Just get to Tony's room, he told himself, his eyes burning into the knob at the end of the hallway- his destination. "I don't want to go with you though," he sighs in annoyance.

He turned and saw Kerry's face fall like Peter had just asked him to build a freaking rocket ship. His voice was tight as he sped up to walk in stride with Peter, explaining, "I've had a long day kiddo-" The last word was spoken in such a derogatorily way it made Peter flinch.

"Don't call me that. I'm sixteen, not five," Peter snapped immediately. In addition to Pete, kiddo was now becoming an only Tony thing as well.

Kerry pursed his lips and sighed, "Mr. Parker, I will not sugar coat this for you. You have no immediate family. Legally, you are to be placed in the care of one of our partner organizations until we can-"

"I'm staying here," Peter hissed, one door away from Tony's room. "What are you gonna do about it?"

The man quickened his pace and cut in front of Peter, blocking his path in the narrow hallway. "I can legally use force. Especially if you instigate the violence," Kerry said, folding his arms in front of him.

"I'm not going to instigate anything-" Peter said stubbornly. The man to his left walked forward, reaching out his hand and Peter tensed, looking over and jumping in shock. Damian was in his place, about to slam a fist against his jaw. Peter reacted, dropping the coffee cup which splashed along the floor as the top popped off. He slapped the hand away and shoved his enemy in the

chest, twisting away from his reaching hand at record speed. Then he blinked, breathing hard and staring at the man in the suit he had just pushed who looked a little mad now.

Double crap.

Peter turned slowly, inching his way to Tony's door, his breathing speeding up as his heart pounded. Just a couple more steps.

Kerry shrugged and made a tisking noise, as if he understood what had just happened, continuing to follow Peter who was moving backward, "Would you look at that! You instigated violence. We can do this the easy way or the hard way."

"Hard," Peter snarled firmly, reaching behind him and twisting the knob, shoving his body full force against the door. It gave way and he stumbled into the room, his whole body relaxing as he passed through the doorway, already feeling safer. He staggered back faster, the man quickening his stride, closing fast as Peter crossed the room in a desperate back peddle.

The man reached and Peter tensed, prepared to fight, but then a voice rang out directly behind him just as he hoped it would, "What the-" then in a split second the voice changed.

"Touch him and I swear to God, it will be the last thing you ever do." That voice was reserved for specific people, the people who even looked at Peter wrong. Not hearing it for three months was painful, and Peter was getting used to hearing it again. He looked over his shoulder and saw Tony glaring in absolute fury, hand clasped against his side as he sat up in bed. He looked over at Peter in concern, "You okay kid?"

Peter nodded to assure him he was, fisting the blanket around the bed, eyeing the man towering over him warily.

Tony narrowed his eyes, "Who the hell are you?"

Kerry straightened in shock as he recognized the man in the hospital bed. His eyes widened, "T-Tony Stark?"

"No, that's me," Tony sighed before he snarled, "I asked who you were."

Kerry flashed a smile and straightened his tie, "I'm with the social services organization, I work for the government and-"

"I never liked the government," Tony said simply. "You know who I am, so what are you still doing here?"

The man pointed at Peter, "Sorry to- disturb you...sir. Do you- do you know this kid?"

Tony's gaze flashed, "His name is Peter Parker. I suggest you call him one of those two for your own sake," he swore dangerously.

Kerry smiled like he had just told a funny joke and he looked down, licking his lips. "Mr. Stark, you have no legal obligation to be involved in this matter so if you don't mind, I request you to stay out of it-" The man reached for Peter again, and that was a death wish.

Tony slipped out of bed and moved forward, gripping Kerry's wrist which had just grasped Peter's arm. Peter realized in shock that he was actually standing, firmly, at that. Then, suddenly, an Iron Man gauntlet came crashing through the window, making the man jump. Glass shattered and littered the ground in a hundred pieces. There were multiple yells of surprise outside, but Tony

didn't flinch, not even as some pieces skidded and hit his socks. He pressed his palm against Kerry's chest, the center heating up.

"Maybe you didn't hear me," Tony hissed dangerously. Kerry looked down, terrified and Tony bit his lip, "That looks like a really expensive suit. It would be a shame to ruin it." He pressed his palm harder into the man's chest, shifting in front of Peter, tightening his grip around Kerry's wrist that was still grasping Peter's arm. Tony got in his face, eyes flashing as he spit out each word with venom. "I said. *Don't. Touch. Him.*"

The man winced at Tony's surprisingly strong grip and released Peter's arm, taking a step back, Tony letting go of the man's wrist in turn. Then, in one solid motion, he moved himself protectively in front of Peter and nodded, "Good. Now what do you want?"

"Unless you plan on signing to be the temporary legal guardian of the kid-" Kerry said slowly. Tony's nostrils flared and the man corrected himself almost instantly, "of *Mr. Parker*...sir, until the retrieval of May Parker's will, then I will have no other choice than to place him in temporary foster care or a government facility or handles this kind of situation-"

"And what makes you think I won't sign?" Tony demanded fiercely.

Kerry stuttered in confusion, "Well- I- you weren't listed as Peter's emergency contact or anywhere for that matter- I didn't even know you two knew-"

Peter looked down in shame but Tony didn't even skip a beat, "I suggest you call someone and check again and then apologize me to me and the kid for being incompetent."

Kerry frowned and pulled out a phone, dialing a number, not even getting a sentence out before he was cut off by the person on the other line, "Oh- really? You've got to- yes- I'll...I'll- yes." He hung up and turned around slowly. "I- I do apologize sir...there has been a mix-up."

Peter hid his relieved smirk by looking down. Tony was a tech whiz, there was no doubt he worked that magic within seconds. Even Tony being his emergency contact again threaded another stitch that helped close the three month wound. Then Tony raised his eyebrows, "You are not very good at your job, are you. I'm supposed to sign something, right, why isn't there a pen in my hand?"

Peter looked up in surprise and shock at that. Tony was going to sign to be his- Peter frowned, of course he would. That was a very Tony thing to do. Or maybe it was the heat of the moment, Tony just doing it to piss Kerry off.

The man licked his lips, sweat beading on his forehead. He whirled around and snapped his fingers, and the man to his left, equally terrified, came forward, shuffling for a document. "S-sign on the X, Mr. Stark."

Tony snatched the pen, not taking the folder, indirectly forcing the man to hold it. He scrawled his signature before tossing the pen to Kerry who caught after a desperate fumble. "Great, are we done here?"

Kerry took a step away, straightening his suit. Suddenly that cocky glare was back, as if distance made him safe and gave him the high ground. "I could sue you, you know."

Tony blinked, "Yes," he drawled. "You do that. Now get out."

"I will take this matter to court," the man warned him with a sneer, pointing at Tony.

Tony scoffed, "I know your boss and I own every single decent lawyer in the state of New York,"

he said with a cocky smirk, winking. "Try me. Pray I'm nice enough not to get you fired right now. Also...I didn't think I heard you apologize to my kid?"

Peter felt warmth spread in his chest and he inched closer to Tony, about to reach up and twist his fingers in Tony's shirt before he realized that was childish. What was wrong with him? He needed to be strong right now, not clingy. Why was he so persistent on sticking next to the one person he had left? The person that he didn't want to lose like he had his parents and Ben and now May! The person who had always felt like a father to him. The one solid rock he had when everything else was falling apart- oh.

Oh-

Wait. Did he say *his kid* Peter thought, looking up at Tony in confusion.

Kerry made a face; he clearly noticed too, "*Your* kid?"

Tony's eyes widened in anger and he hissed, "Did I stutter?" A smile crept onto Peter's face as well as tears in his eyes that he blinked away.

"I am sorry...Mr. Parker," the man stuttered, looking vaguely in Peter's direction who gave him an angry and distracted nod.

The man glared at the both of them, just standing there, his coworkers behind him clearly uncomfortable. The stand off ended when Tony looked at the door in confusion. He cocked his head, "I said get out, are you hard of hearing?" And for extra incentive he raised his palm heating up with a blast. "Don't test me," he swore. The man practically fell over his own feet and staggered backwards, pushing his men out and slamming the door behind him.

"Thank God they didn't call my bluff," Tony let out a groan of pain once the footsteps faded, his legs buckling. Peter caught him from behind, slipping his arm around his chest as he kept him standing. Peter staggered, his ribs screaming in pain, but he managed to slip himself under Tony's good shoulder.

"Easy, there we go," Peter winced, easing him back onto his bed, not leaving his side, his hand still against his shoulder. "What the heck were you thinking?" Peter demanded to cover up his concern, gratitude, shock, pain, relief...

Tony winced as he sucked in a painful breath. He chuckled, "I wasn't thinking."

Peter blinks his grip still tight on Tony's arm, "Of course you weren't."

Tony gave him a look and rolled his eyes, "What? He was gonna freaking grab you, he was a jerk, and I handled it." Tony looks around and frowns, his eyes flashing to show he was teasing. "Hey, where's my coffee?"

"Shut up," Peter laughed, moving a pillow aside so he could sit straight up, pressing his hand against his back, unwilling to give up the physical contact that he needed to stay strong, for reasons he didn't know.

Tony looked over at him with a raised eyebrow and snorted, "You're welcome by the way."

"Thanks," Peter said quietly but genuinely, about to start to say something- possibly in the arena of what Tony was to him during this time. Instead he said, "You're welcome for catching you."

Tony nods, "Thanks."

Suddenly, the door slammed open and Steve, Nat, and Tony rushed in with wide eyes and horrified expressions, their eyes falling on different parts of the room. "We left you alone for two minutes!" Steve spluttered. They were probably not only talking about the grown men in suits who were running away to cry to their mothers but also the shattered window which had caused glass to clutter the floor.

Tony made a face, shaking his hand and letting the gauntlet fall to the bed, "I told you I didn't like the windows."

"So you shattered them?" Rhodey asked incredulously.

Natasha pointed and exclaimed, "Where did you get a suit?"

"I always have a suit," Tony said innocently.

Rhodey puts a hand to his head and looks back at the other Avengers. "He always has a suit," he repeats, chuckling, like that solved everything.

Tony scoffed, "It's okay. I think I have enough money to pay for it."

"That is your motto," Steve rolled his eyes, running a hand through his hair. He pointed out the door, "Ok, but why did I just see four dudes running like someone had just pantsed them, out of your room?"

"Because Tony pantsed them," Peter said, deadly serious.

"You what?" Natasha demanded, her eyes shooting wide.

"Metaphorically," Tony snapped, glaring at Peter who smiled innocently. "They worked for the government. I don't like the government."

Rhodey crossed his arms, "Yes, we know that."

"They wanted to take the kid and I wasn't going to let that happen," Tony said firmly. "I signed to be his temporary guardian. Just thought you all should know. I was going to tell you, but I figured screams and glass breaking would do the trick."

Peter was about to speak up that this was similar to the time when they had found the base of one of the new villains that had been traumatizing the city, and to call the police, Tony didn't use a phone- no, he simply blew up one of the cars that was outside of the warehouse. The police got there record time, and Tony claimed it was efficient. But then Peter realized that this wasn't that Tony. He wasn't that Peter. A lot had happened, that had forced them apart, a wound that had salt poured into it, stopping them from getting back to what they once had.

Steve, Nat, and Rhodey started at him, and then they switched their gazes to the seemingly more trustworthy and less impulsive Peter, who nodded helpfully once he snapped himself out of his wandering memories. Steve sighed in surrender and drawled, "Well then why didn't you just say so?" Peter found it comforting that he didn't have a problem with Tony. We'll be down the hall."

"Hey, don't go slipping on the coffee on your way out. And get me a new one, please? Peter, you're fired from coffee duty. You're staying here," Tony said firmly. He gave Peter a look that said, I'm not letting you out of my sight. Peter didn't argue.

"And the window too," Natasha reminded him.

Tony made a face and waved his good hand, "No, not the window. I liked breaking that ugly thing. It made me smile," he decides happily.

"We're cleaning up the window," Rhodey huffed, following Steve to the door. "And we're not getting you coffee."

"Why not?" Tony asked. "I'm shot. I almost died. Take pity!"

"I'm not your nurse!" Steve shouts in agreement over his shoulder.

"He's really milking it, isn't he?" Natasha sighs.

"I like it black," Tony calls helpfully.

"Fine," Rhodey says, shutting the door behind them.

Tony looks over at Peter who's smile is slowly fading. He frowns, "Kid...are you okay? You got a little rattled there, huh? I'll make sure that guy gets fired, mark my words."

Peter waved his good hand, "No, no, it's fine. Thanks, though. I just...panicked. I should have handled it- you probably ripped the stitch or something," Peter's voice dripped with guilt.

"I'm fine kid, don't worry about me," Tony assured him. "Did he hurt you? Before you got in here, did he so much as scratch you?"

Peter shook his head firmly, "No." Tony took a deep breath of relief as he twisted, arching his back. The man couldn't hide his wince and Peter pursed his lips. "Are you sure you're-"

Tony forced a smile, "I'm okay, Pete. I promise."

Peter gave him a smirk as he sank back into the chair by Tony's side as the man leaned back against the pillows. "Hypocrite," Peter decided. "I can't worry about you but you take me off coffee duty."

"You can't walk 10 feet without starting a fight, can you?" Tony teased, closing his eyes and sinking into the bed. "No, sir, you're not allowed out of this room without me."

Peter rubs his chin and asks seriously, "What if I have to go to the bathroom?"

Tony scoffs, "Now you're just being difficult."

Peter grins and points out, "I could just slip out when you're sleeping?"

Tony opens his eyes and looks over at Peter, a shred of sincerity hitting hard between them as he speaks in a low voice. "Then we'd have a problem. You better be here when I get up, Parker."

Peter smiled at him and as Tony fell back asleep in the hospital bed, his face creased with lines of pain, Peter lowered his head to his chest before looking up with a solid smile and tears in his eyes. "Yes, sir."

"Home, sweet freaking home," Clint announced, a pep in his step as he spun to face the rest of the team with his arms extended. The Avengers entered the compound, heading straight for the med bay.

"You were here yesterday, Clint," Natasha said, rolling her eyes.

"Yes, and?" Clint asked in confusion. Tony and Peter both glared at him and he sobered his expression with a guilty smile.

Tony, who was in between Peter and Steve, grinned, "Aren't you glad Pepper isn't here? She'd kill you if she saw me fresh out of the hospital. At least I'll have a bit of time to heal before she gets back. How did she handle this all? I called her but she didn't answer- I know she's on that conference."

Steve looked down, before he cleared his throat and glanced towards the other Avengers for help. No assistance came and Steve chuckled nervously, rubbing his neck, "Well...she took it really well actually."

"You didn't tell her," Tony realizes, his face dropping. He looks around in shock. "So the world didn't know, and my own *fiance* didn't know? Are you kidding me? No one mourned?" Tony shakes his head, "Unbelievable. You guys are screwed, by the way, I hope you know that."

"It was all Steve's idea," Bucky coughs.

Tony turns to his best friend, "Good one, Steve. Really smart. Were you thinking at all when you decided to not get her in the loop? Do you even know Pepper?"

"Shut up," Steve groans. "I know I'm screwed," he mumbled.

"No, I don't think that's a strong enough word," Tony decides.

Steve looks miserable and Rhodey pats his shoulder, "You brought this on yourself buddy. Is it time to say I told you so?"

"I have my shield and I'm not afraid to use it," Steve threatens, Rhodey backing away with a grin.

"Screwed," Tony hoots.

They walked in silence the rest of the way to the medbay, Peter and Tony looking around at the walls like they were the best thing in the world. Peter hadn't been here in three months, and the kid was clearly shaken when they reached the med bay. He had just been torn away from his new life and thrust back into his old one. Tony couldn't possibly imagine what he must feel right now, walking in the same hallway, with the same windows and chairs- everything so painfully familiar. And the kid...well he was holding back tears, taking deep breaths to keep himself calm because the Avengers were here, and Tony knew he wouldn't break in front of them. He didn't trust them yet. He didn't forgive them. He only hoped Peter would loosen up once they talked, even though he knew he didn't deserve to be forgiven.

"There are two beds," Peter said slowly as they walked through the doorway. The kid stopped and pointed, "Why are there two beds?" They were in the closed off section which had already been prepped.

"Well we aren't sharing one," Tony snorted, patting him on his good shoulder as he walked by.

"I don't need a bed," Peter said in confusion. "I'm perfectly fine."

The team cleared their throat and stepped back, urging Tony to take this one because it had been proven that he was the only one who had been able to get through to the kid. Everyone else who tried was given a look that sent them stumbling backwards, not in fear, but just in...Tony didn't

know the right word for it. But he knew Peter wasn't going anywhere without him, and that the kid had been within touching distance since the hospital.

Tony put his good arm around Peter and smiled fakely, "Yeah okay, Mr. Incredible? You look like you lost a fight with a block of cement."

"I pretty much did lose a fight with a block of cement," Peter nodded, shrugging as if asking how that had relevance and characterized him as 'not ok'. Peter's definition of pain was warped and it hurt everyone in that room, especially Tony who had seen it first hand.

"Yeah, I know you did. We both did. And we both need to heal, Peter. You included. You- you had it worse," Tony said weakly. "I wish you didn't, but you did."

"Yeah, but I'm *fine*," Peter insisted, looking at Tony like he was crazy. Tony locked eyes with him and narrowed his gaze, diving past the stubbornness and defiance and Peter's need to appear strong until he got to the tortured, broken, saddened, ruined shell of the kid he loved.

"Peter, you're not okay," Tony whispered to him, so that the team couldn't hear. At that accusation, Peter straightens and looks away, but only for a second, his hands clenching. Tony doesn't ask him to meet his eyes again, but he continues and Peter's gaze finds it's way back, timid and innocent, "And no one expects you to. Just one day here, that's all I ask. Please."

Peter glares and shrugs him off lightly, mostly to make a point before he lowers his gaze and nods, walking over to the hospital bed that was positioned next to Tony's. With a wince he leaned against it and looked at the team who stood watching. "You're not gonna watch me sleep, are you?" Peter gave them all a look and everyone shook their heads, pointing to the door and starting to back out.

"I've got to go to a conference with Ross," Rhodey stuttered. "Bruce, care to join me?"

"Sure," Bruce nodded uncomfortably.

Tony smirked and called, "Tell him I hope he dies in a hole."

"Will do," Rhodey gave him a thumbs up.

"Unpacking...stuff....to do," Bucky said, patting Sam on the shoulder with a confident smile. "Sam's helping me."

"I am?" Sam said, and Bucky blinked, shooting him a death look. Sam grinned, "I am."

"Jet," Clint said, giving them both a wave as he slipped out.

"We're not gonna make up any excuse," Vision joked sincerely, he and Wanda offering them a small smile.

"If you guys need anything," Natasha said, giving Tony a wink and Peter a supportive nod. "We've got food, water, and med supplies being sent."

"And I'm sure FRIDAY is glad to have you back," Steve said happily, Tony's expression brightening at the name of his A.I.

"Peter yes. Tony...I could go a few more days without his dancing to Jingle Bell Rock."

Tony scoffed in disbelief and looked to the ceiling, "Nice to see you too FRIDAY. You probably withheld information so it took longer to find me."

"I did no such thing. Hi Peter," she said sweetly.

"Hi FRIDAY," Peter said quietly.

Steve slipped through the door, poking his head out, "I'll- leave you guys to get some sleep...it's good to have you back. Both of you."

Tony gave him a salute, "Thanks Steve."

The door shut with a soft click and Peter brought his legs up to his chest, looking around the familiar room. He tried for a weak chuckle, "You didn't change anything."

"Nah," Tony said, clearing his throat and trying for a smile.

Peter blinked, unsure of what to say next. It seemed Tony was the same way. The awkwardness competed with the tension that thickened in the room like fog. Finally Peter just turns and exclaims, "Why is it different?"

"What?"

"What's wrong with us?" Peter asked. "We could talk somewhat at the hospital, why can't we now?"

"I-" Tony seems to be at a loss for words and he shakes his head in confusion, "I don't know, kid."

They leave it at that.

Until Peter feels the tidal wave coming in the deep pit in his stomach and he sucks in a breath, feeling his insides being winded by that tight and familiar knot that had caused him so much pain. Peter squeezes his eyes shut, tears slipping out despite his attempts to keep them from falling and they spill over his cheeks. Every breath he takes burns, but he still stays quiet, shaking in concentration, his head pounding as he holds his breath to keep the sobs at bay. His ears are ringing and his lungs clench, but Peter still manages to keep it all inside until....

"Peter."

"I can't-" he whispers, putting his hand to his mouth and lowering his head. He feels something inside being slowly eaten away and he's helpless to stop it. Desperately trying to stop a panic attack from happening, he decided to announce it's source. "I can't believe she's....gone, Tony," he whispers brokenly, digging his chin into his chest, his shoulders shaking.

Tony is silent for a while before he chokes out, "Kid, I- I am so sorry."

"I want to believe she's not...dead," Peter admitted, nodding firmly. "I really want to. But...I know. I knew the minute I answered that call," Peter said brokenly. "And I want to act fine, but to be honest, I don't know how to act. Just after everything...I don't know anymore Tony, I don't know-" He shakes his head firmly, his hand curling around the blanket on the bed. "It hurts."

"Can I do anything?" Tony asks.

"No," Peter gives him a smile. "No. And neither can I. I just...I've been to too many funerals. I know the pain. I lost my parents, and I lost Ben. But now...this...it just hurts so much Tony, I don't know how to handle it."

"Like your circuits are fried," Tony whispers. Perhaps it wasn't the best thing to say, but if they

ever had to explain something to one another, they would sometimes resort to mechanics. It's a task they did together, what they bonded over, a language they both understood.

Peter turns to him and nods, "Yeah. Yeah, exactly like that. After everything Damian did- and that hurt," Peter tries to laugh but Tony can hear the pain in his gaze. "It's...I'd take an eternity of that so I could at least...feel it, you know?"

Tony knew. His silence spoke louder than any words he could ever say. Peter nods, responding to Tony's nonverbal support and encouragement. Then he wipes his cheeks angrily with the back of his fist. He sat there shaking before he whispered, "What now?"

Tony frowns, "What do you mean?"

"I mean what now," Peter shrugged, choking on another sob as he tried to laugh despite the circumstances. "What- what's gonna happen to me?"

Tony's frown worsens, "What the hell do you mean?" Peter jumps at his sudden curse and looks over in confusion. He sees Tony sporting the exact same expression. Tony speaks firmly, "Peter, you can stay here-"

Then he suddenly bites his tongue, trying to cover up the thudding sound of his heart dropping. He realizes if Peter asked what would happen to him, it meant he didn't want to stay here with Tony, at the compound. Maybe he wanted to move in with Ned, maybe he wanted to-

Little did he know, that wasn't the reason at all. The reason was because Peter didn't know if Tony wanted him here, if he wanted him back in his life so quickly, and at this level of responsibility. Peter's heart dropped as Tony's offer was cut short, because maybe Tony thought logically for one second and realized he didn't want the kid he had pushed out, to live here, to stay with him.

Both looked down in sadness.

Tony cursed silently and shook his head, letting out a torrent of words, stuttering, "No. No. You know what? I am tired of this. Until we get back into communicating flawlessly, I'm not letting this-" he motioned between them, "happen. I'm gonna just speak- speak for myself, I guess." Tony clasped his hands and gave a nod, "Yeah." He took a breath and blurted out, "I don't want you to leave. That's the bottom line." Peter's head snapped up and Tony met his eyes hesitantly. He shrugged, "I want you to stay. I only trailed off because I thought if you were asking what would happen, then you wouldn't want to stay here, or have anything to do with me. And if that's the case, I get it. I deserve that. But..." Tony steered clear of the three month talk, so he decided to wrap up his statement. "Yeah, well, that's my two cents."

"I- I can stay?" Peter asks after a second, cocking his head. It hurt Tony's heart that he even had to ask. What had happened to them?

"If you want," Tony nodded. "It's up to you kid. All of this is up to you." He wanted nothing more than to just forget everything that happened, go back in time and fix all of this, or at least take the kids pain, but a three month gap was between them, separating them on either sides of the room and it burned whenever he got too close. So...they kept their distance.

"You don't have to..." Peter started, before he suddenly became interested in the blanket, his fingers picking at a small stray on the end, his hand shaking. Tony didn't want to interrupt him again, so he let him collect his thoughts and finish. The kid mumbled, "I'll just be a burden-"

"Stop it," Tony hissed. Once again, the teen looked up in shock at the blatant display of harsh

emotion. Tony shook his head, "No. You've never been a burden. Ever. And you never will be."

"Tony-" Peter sighed in a huge range of emotions, ran a hand in his hair. His breath hitched and Tony visibly saw Peter swallow a sob.

"What?" Tony demanded. "Seriously. What?" he asked sincerely.

"So, I just live here?" Peter asked with a slight smirk- a resort to humor to cope, Tony of all people knew. Peter spluttered like it was an absurd idea....which it wasn't.

"Yes!" Tony exclaimed, like it was just a given....which it wasn't.

Silence. There was that burn again. The three month burn that scorched both of them.

"And what happens when the temporary legal guardian thing runs out?" Peter said, his gaze filled with desperate hope and despair that were falling through the cracks of the broken glass at an alarming rate. He was grasping. He wanted it to be possible, so bad, that he was thinking of everything that could go wrong, because he knew something would go wrong- because everything had gone wrong. Peter hadn't gotten a break. So he wasn't willing to accept the fact that he just might have been given one.

"Well May's will is gonna be read soon-" Tony said slowly, wincing at her name to see if Peter was okay with him mentioning it, but the boy was too rallied up to react much.

"Tony, I have no living relatives, there's not gonna be a name on there. I don't have a family written up to go to!" Peter yelled. Tony winced at that, his heart clenched tightly. He tries not to show it because he knew if Peter even thought for a second that he was hurt by his words, he would be in more pain, and Tony wasn't about to let that happen. His eyes however said, you don't have a family? Yes you do, kid. Yes, of course you do. You always did.

"We'll figure that out too!" Tony shouted, wondering why they escalated to screaming so quickly. He lowered his voice, "I'm not letting you go to some frickin foster care place or any stupid government agency!" He ended firmly, promising then and there. He would not let that happen. Over his dead body.

Peter scoffed, tears in his eyes that were filled with hope he prayed wasn't false. The kid responded quickly, but his voice was anything but fierce, "You can't promise that."

It wasn't a statement. It was a plea. It was Peter, who had confided in him, who had trusted him, who had become like a son to him, begging that he didn't abandon him like he did last time. It was Peter asking him to promise one more time that he wouldn't leave, that he wouldn't walk out, that he would make up for what he did and stick by his side no matter what. That he would fight for him.

"Yes I can," Tony swore, leaning forward, his eyes flashing as he locked his gaze with his kid. He poured three months of pain into his voice- so much pain that it overflowed and cracked, "I *can* promise that and I *will* promise that. I swear to God, Peter, I will not let that happen."

Peter's eyes welled with tears and his shoulders relaxed. He took a shaky breath and wiped his eyes again, "I- thanks."

"You don't need to thank me," Tony said quietly.

"Ok, I take it back," Peter grinned weakly. Tony chuckled. "But what happens?" Peter mumbles, running a hand through his messy mop of curls. He had been doing it often and Tony wondered

where he learned it from, until he felt his own hand raking through his own hair. It was comforting to know that he and Peter still shared some things. He needed to be reminded of that every time he saw the kid. Those reminders combated the pain of knowing how far they had grown apart over three months. Peter's voice brought him pain as the kid whispered, "There won't be a person on the will, Tony." The kid tried to smile. "I'll bet you the fifty you gave me."

Tony almost laughed in delight. Wow, that was a while ago. "That was mine," he reminded him with a spark in his eyes.

"That I found," Peter protested.

"That I won back," Tony countered.

"That you gave back to me," Peter finished.

"I guess I am a softie," Tony sighed.

"We all knew that," Peter grins, looking down as the moment died. His expression turned serious and he looks up and shrugs, "So what happens then. When no one is listed?"

"You'll just stay here," Tony said firmly. He wasn't about to let this kid get taken away, ever again.

Peter gives him a look and shakes his head, "The laws-"

"Screw the laws," Tony said angrily.

Peter made a face, "Tony-"

"I mean it!" Tony announced furiously, stabbing a finger into his chest. "They can come talk to me if they have a problem-"

"They're not going to allow it!"

"Who's they?"

"I don't know-"

"Exactly, so we'll cross that bridge if we come to it."

"When."

"What?"

"*When* we come to it."

"You're staying here, they can throw a hissy fit, I really don't care. You're not going anywhere with them."

"And what are you gonna do? Adopt me?"

"YES!" Tony snapped.

Silence.

Peter blinked. "Oh." He paused, opening and closing his mouth before he asked, "Really? You

would- you want to-" the kid trailed off with no attempt to get back on track.

Tony tried to recover, "If I have to," his eyes widen and he retraces his steps, "no that came out wrong- it's not something I *have* to do it's something I want- I mean," he stuttered, running a hand through his goatee. "If that's what it takes- if that's what you, I mean- obviously I- but-" he choked out before he stopped and met the kid's eyes in question. "Would you- do you-"

Peter blinked again, "I-"

"You don't have to answer that."

"I kind of do..."

"No, it was stupid of me to-"

"Was it?"

"No."

"Right."

"So..."

"So..."

Silence again.

Well that was a bomb shell.

And-

Crap.

Oh *crap*.

As much as Tony didn't want this part to happen, it had to before they continued that conversation any longer. "Peter," he said quietly. "This is...incredibly bad timing. Of course it is. There is no good timing. But that will be coming soon and if, *if* there is a person on that piece of paper, I don't know how much I can do. We may have a shot if we have everything set up already but..."

Peter shifted in his spot, saying nothing, just waiting for Tony- trusting Tony.

"I know you don't want to talk, let alone argue and try and work things out right now and I hate to ask you to get into this. I hate it- I know that you're not ready for this, and I know you may never be. Trust me, I wish we could keep burying it, but we can't. It can't be buried any deeper, at least not for me. And where it is right now is at the bottom of my stomach, and it's eating away, it's burning, and it hurts," he confessed weakly, looking down. "So before we go back to that conversation, and we will go back to that conversation," he added firmly, giving Peter a nod.

"We need to talk," Peter finished in agreement.

"We need to talk," Tony repeated with a painful wince.

Peter nodded, "The three month talk."

"Yeah," Tony said, exhaling shakily and scratching the back of his neck.

"We're gonna fight," Peter warned him, tears forming in his eyes that he blinked away with a sad smile.

"Put up your dukes then," Tony coughed, shooting him a grin.

"And we're gonna say stuff we don't mean," Peter whispered.

"Well I'm glad we've established that now," Tony nodded firmly.

Peter bit his lip and twisted so his feet hung on the bed as he said timidly, "Just no walking out."

Tony smiled, nodding at Peter firmly. "No walking out. I promise."

"Okay, well start your engines. You're going down," Peter chuckled, and it sounded like a sob.

"Yeah, I probably am. You sure you're okay with this?" Tony asked nervously. He hated this. He hated asking Peter to allow himself to get hurt again.

"No," Peter shook his head firmly. "No, absolutely not."

"I don't want to do this," Tony says slowly. "I hope you know that. I hate fighting."

"I hate it too," Peter said in agreement, taking a deep breath. "But...I want to get back to that other conversation. And this won't be much of a fight with the two of us having two broken arms."

Tony smirked and nodded, "True."

"Can you stand?" Peter asked. "I can't argue with you if you're sitting down."

"You're kidding right?"

"No, I can't take you seriously." Tony rolled his eyes and slipped cautiously off the bed, gaining his balance, Peter watching him warily, ready to catch him if he lost his footing. He stood straight and nodded, clearing his throat. Peter rubbed his nose and made a face as he too slipped off the bed and stood opposite from him, narrowing his eyes, "Ok. I'm ready. You first."

"No, I think it's better if you go first," Tony said nervously.

Peter held out his hand flat against his chest for where it was in his sling and he made a fist over it. Rock Paper Scissors. Tony smiled, doing the same.

Chapter End Notes

TADAAAAA FIRST THING NEXT CHAPTER: the results of the rock paper scissors and the thing we have all been waiting for: the 3 month talk.

DUNDUNDUNNNNN. I wanted to squeeze it in this one but it was already my preferred word limit so I saved it haha. But it's gonna be awesome and we may or may not get a hug huh who said that idk ANYWAY lots of fluff and comfort coming up. A bunch of reunions to come. And also a slowwwwww but sure Tony and Peter recovery- they definitely have a lot to work through and one talk wont fix it but it will definitely be a start!!! Let me stop telling you what is to come haha because there is a lot! And I can't wait to write it. New chapter ASAP, probs 5-6 days so hang in there,

stay on the edge of your seat! Please drop a comment, tell me what you thought, and thank you guys so much for all your kind words and support!

I love you all 3000 <3 <3

An Undeniable Unhealthy Codependent Relationship

Chapter Summary

I just wanted to take this time to get real and give a huge thank you. Writing on here as been super fun and has honestly changed my life. You guys encourage me and ur comments never fail to make me smile even at my lowest. I wrote my college essay about this whole surreal experience, hard to express in 650 or less words but I got it done. So a big thank you to everyone who reads, writes comments, shares this, and leaves a kudos! You all are amazing and I am so grateful for your support :) Many more stories to come!

Chapter Notes

HELLOOOOO LOVELY READERS!

Get ready for the longest chapter yet!!! I'm not kidding its like 12k or something. 80% of it is fighting. While writing i finished the fight and was like wow thats long, but rather than take out some out I was like eh what the hell just leave it in there because all of it is necessary XD so I didn't cut anything because it's all pretty gold i gotta say *pats self on back* ew I hate complimenting myself i'll stop

Hi everybodyyyyyyyy! This is the moment youve all been waiting for and I rly hope it doesnt disapoint because there are so many emotions clashing in this chapter and I'm trying to make it realistic because sometimes you just yell and then go quiet, or sometimes there are some rly long and awkward pauses and sometimes you get interrupted!!!

Reunions in this one :))))))

But yes, it's all chaotic, but were slowly mending. Thank you guys for all your support, I am currently loving life and drinking coffee so I hope you all are having a great day!!!!!!! Thank you for all the comments, and I rly hope you enjoy the chapter <3
<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tony held his nose which was dripping blood and he groaned in pain, blinking away the white spots that were threatening to cloud his vision. Peter shook out his hand, wincing and muttering, "Sorry."

The kid had won the first round by showing scissors, before announcing it was best out of three. Peter had won again, this time with rock, meaning he would go first. The boy sighed, looking up at Tony who was bracing for the torrent of words he knew was coming. Peter took a deep breath, before he threw a hard punch to Tony's face.

Tony had staggered back, his head snapping up, blood rushing from his nose as he groaned. The kid had just apologized and Tony shot him a look, "No you're not. Well," he scrunched up his nose, trying to stop the bleeding. "We saw that coming. I deserved it."

"Yeah, you did," Peter agreed firmly. He didn't put any indecisiveness in his tone.

"I just didn't realize that 'rock' meant punch the loser in the face, that's all," Tony said, pinching the bridge of his nose as he stole a glance at the kid.

Peter handed him a tissue box and ice pack for the injury and smiled, "So I'm sure that you want to play with Steve now."

Tony grinned, accepting both things offered and wiping off the blood, "Oh 100%." He leaned against the bed, blinking harshly before he waved his hand and moved it away from his face, planting his feet, "Okay. Come on. Take another shot if you want."

Peter shook his head and stuck his hand in his pocket to show he was done, "I had my fill. Rain check."

Tony smirked gratefully, although wary that Peter had announced a rain check. He chuckled, grabbing another tissue to wipe his bloody nose, "Thanks. Alright then. Hit me. Not literally, but you know what I mean. Wait, we never decided what the winner gets. Do you get to go first?"

"I did go first," Peter says, holding up his fist.

"So is it my turn now?" Tony asks nervously.

"No," Peter shakes his head.

"Ok." Tony wasn't about to argue.

Silence. They both hated it.

"You want to start at the beginning?" Peter asked after he could handle the tenseness no longer. Tony shrugged, pressing the ice pack against his nose. Peter nodded and took a deep breath, "You had your Independence Day speech while I was unconscious. I had no say in the matter whatsoever."

"You would have talked me out of it," Tony said immediately. He had started off strong but he then backed off in his next sentence till it was a low mumble, "That's why I didn't tell you. I know you would have talked me out of it, you always can."

"Not this time apparently," Peter shook his head, "because then I wake up in my house, May is being all cryptic and then I go to my phone and suddenly your contact is erased and Karen has no idea who you are. Like you just disappeared from my life. Do you know how much that freaked me out?" he demanded.

Tony looked down and muttered, "I'm sorry."

Peter was about to continue before he heard the pain in Tony's voice. Pain that he shared, a tone that Tony rarely used. Peter trailed off what he was going to say and addressed him first, meeting Tony's eyes. "Thanks," he said slowly, and he meant it. Peter appreciated that, but he knew they couldn't just stop every time one of them apologized, otherwise this would never get done.

"I don't want to fight," Peter admitted quietly, hating himself for saying it but it was true.

"Neither do I," Tony agreed. "But we have to. We need to work this out."

"I know," Peter nodded firmly. It would escalate if he kept going, he knew that.

He kept going.

Peter tapped into the anger that was settling at the bottom of his stomach, feeling his jaw clench on its own, "So then I called you, and you had the nerve to hang up on me, thinking, what, that I would call it a day and snuggle back up in bed?"

"I didn't know what I thought," Tony admitted. "I *should have* known you would be an idiot and swing all the way to the compound."

"Next time get me a cab, that was hell on my stitches," Peter gave him a weak smile.

Tony grinned but then said sincerely, "There won't be a next time."

Peter felt his eyes sting at that and he looked down, hiding the impact of those words. He looked up and nodded, "So then we get there and...we fight. And the exact thing I said would happen if you went through with your stupid plan, happened. We lost contact, we separated, we didn't talk, we didn't see each other, and we didn't call. For three months. And you think I was happy that entire time?" Peter demanded. Tony didn't meet his eyes and Peter asked, "Were you?"

Tony shook his head without missing a beat, "No."

"You said it was because this way, I would be protected!" Peter mocked Tony's words that were spoken what seemed like years ago. "That I would be safe! But I would never be safe!" he exclaimed, tears coming to his eyes. He lowered his voice and mumbled, "We both knew that."

"I didn't. I should have known that, but I didn't. Kid, I thought I was helping. I haven't exactly had the best history when it comes to people I love," Tony said quietly.

"But I'm different," Peter insisted, taking a step forward. He expected Tony to disagree in the heat of the moment, but he didn't.

"Yes," Tony nodded in agreement. He looked at Peter and shrugged, "You are. Kid, you mean more to me than..." Tony trailed off and Peter felt his eyes burn as he held back tears. His chest clenched as they locked gazes, trying to communicate more words than they were willing to say at this point.

"Meaning you're even more of a target," Tony finishes and Peter breaks the eye contact with a scoff, the last sentence said through their gazes burned away. Tony insisted though, his tone pressing, and Peter was compelled to look back at him. "If someone wanted to hurt me, they would go right for you- they did go right for you!" Tony exclaimed. "Damian tortured you to get to me," the man hissed, his eyes filled with pain as he no doubt remembered what he felt like when he saw his kid on the ground convulsing from shocks he was helpless to stop. Or when the duct tape sucked in over Peter's mouth as Damian dragged that knife down his arm creating a line of red in his wake. Peter took a step back, his shoulders falling; Tony had won this one.

"I know," Peter assured him, quick to jump and stop the train before it left the station; he knew where Tony was headed. "But it wasn't-"

"Don't you dare tell me it wasn't my fault," Tony hissed instantly. His tone was dripping with misdirected anger, but luckily Peter knew that. Only the pain underneath was meant for him. Tony looked down in exasperation before he closed his eyes and then scratched his neck, "I'm always good at analogies, so-"

"No you're not," Peter interrupts with a slight smile.

Tony blinks, "Uh, yes, yes, I am."

"Remember the screwed the pooch one?" Peter reminds him of better days. "Take the dog to the free clinic and raise the hybrid puppies or something like that?"

Tony makes a face, "That was one time. Let me try again." Peter stays quiet, giving him a nod and Tony continues, "I have this...brick wall."

Peter snorts and Tony glares at him before he falters. He had gotten nowhere being indecisive with the kid. Pepper was right. The one thing he was bad at was telling Peter what he meant to him. So if the boy was ever going to forgive him, understand what he meant to him, and earn this kid's trust back, he had to be straight with him. For once he had to convey it without making any jokes, avoiding the main topic, or letting Peter interrupt him.

Tony shifted his position and straightened, "Fine, I'll get real. I don't..." Just say it. "I don't let people in. I have a few close friends, and the team. Everyone else..." he trails off before shaking his head, "It takes them years to gain my trust, to have me reciprocate that trust. But with you, it was different. You were different. I trusted you, I opened up to you, I was protective of you, and it scared me. Especially since I haven't been that good at protecting people."

"Tony," Peter said quietly, before stopping once he saw the look on the man's face. It was a silent plea. He was asking him to let him say it. Begging him to. In all of Peter's time of knowing the man, never had he seen that look. Tony didn't need to ask him out loud; the minute he saw that look, Peter backed off.

"Let me finish. I have a point," Tony insisted, quietly. "Everyone around me gets hurt. People are dead because of the villains born out of hatred for me. The people who I couldn't save are dead cause of me. Sokovia? On me. I've learned to live with that curse. My parents? Dead. Rhodey? Kidnapped by the guy trying to get to me. Pepper? Also kidnapped, experimented on, and nearly killed multiple times by the people trying to get to me. Steve? I fought my best friend because of the power hungry idiots trying to tear our team apart. And we did get torn apart. For a couple months. And the stuff they went through because I couldn't do enough to help them..."

Tony tossed the ice pack aside and it landed with a small thud on the bed. Peter's eyes strayed to it out of instinct but the next line sent his gaze snapping back.

"And then you walk in. A fifteen year old from Queens with an outstanding GPA. And you're a superhero." Peter smiles and Tony takes a breath, "And when I met you, my instant thought was to get you out of that onesie because you were gonna meet enemies, kid. You needed to have more protection than a sweatshirt and swimming goggles. But when I gave you the suit...it did the opposite. I sent you to fight Captain America, and you got launched across the tarmac." Tony waved his hand as if to demonstrate, and Peter smirked slightly at that.

"Why- why are you laughing?" the man asked in confusion.

Peter didn't know why it was so funny but he cracked another smile and mimicked Tony's hand motion, "I went flying. Thank you for the visual."

"Shut up," Tony laughed, sharing his sense of humor. The man sighed, "How am I supposed to get back to the atmosphere we had a couple seconds ago, kid? Thanks a lot."

"We're already back," Peter assured him, keeping a straight face.

Tony gave him a small smile and announced, "You suck."

"Pick up where I did that beautiful arc and landed on the tarmac," Peter instructed.

"I can stop?" Tony teased with a hint of exasperation.

"No, no," Peter giggled. "I-" he sobered his expression and nodded at Tony, "Keep going."

Tony nodded, the air in the room returning to normal. Their expressions lost their smiles, but not the affection. Tony's voice was instantly layered with pain due to the constant weight he felt on his shoulders, "You were on that ground at the airport, motionless. I could have shot down Steve's plane and stopped everything then and there but instead, the 15 year old who was limp on the ground caught my eye and you were all I cared about. Do you understand how bad that scared me? I had barely known you for a week and I was willing to do anything for you and I knew you would do the same for me."

"That's not a crime," Peter hissed, surprised at how quickly his anger had taken hold. Tony hadn't even said something controversial and Peter had pounced, contradicting him.

"I know it's not," Tony said quietly, assuring him and Peter's shoulder slowly relaxed. "But it scared the crap out of me. And then, you got involved with bigger villains, ones that have beef with me, who hurt you because of me, even with the suit. I took it away, and you got hurt then too! I had no idea what I was doing except that I failing you, kid," Tony said weakly. "I tried my best, Peter, I never wanted you to get hurt. And I thought we hit a good patch and started to consider that maybe, just maybe, I was doing something right. And then you went and jumped in front of that glider and almost died because of me. And we went over this, Pete. It had been my fault every time you got hurt. You didn't deny it."

"I know, but-" Peter insisted weakly. Tony was right. He remembered that part of the conversation distinctly. He hadn't denied it. That had been the closest he had come to understanding Tony's side of things during that whole argument.

"No, there were no buts in my mind," Tony said plainly, recognizing Peter's disbelief over agreeing against his will to the previous statement. "I was selfish and stupid, so I did the one thing I could think of, that I thought would help. And that was removing myself from the situation," he finished. "And that's not an excuse," he added quickly.

Good. Peter was just about to say that. "No," he said instead. "It was a dumb move though," Peter whispered.

Tony nodded, "Dumb move. But at the time it seemed justifiable. Especially since..." the man bit his lip, wincing slightly like this was something he didn't want to bring up but knew he had to. There was only one thing that could mean. And Peter knew exactly what it was.

"Because of what he said to you," Peter said quietly, his eyes narrowed. "The Goblin."

Tony tried to smile and he shrugged in defeat as best he could with a broken arm, "You always know me, kid. I didn't even have to say it."

"What did he tell you?" Peter asked firmly, not missing the flinch that was caused by him asking that question.

"You were hurt," Tony said, avoiding his eyes. He shook his head, the next couple sentences falling out like a torrent of words, "And he let me know that. And then he told me that you were getting hurt because of *me* and that if I wanted to continue this life then I should go ahead, but know that I would be signing your death warrant, along with anyone else I cared about."

"Tony, he was trying to get under your skin," Peter insisted.

"Yeah! And it worked!" Tony spluttered almost instantly, making Peter jump. "And the worst part, which we can both agree on, is that he wasn't wrong!" His gaze changed and a look of anger and sadness washed over the man's face as he spit out, "And this was the part where you said I was choosing his word over yours, which is not what I did."

Peter looked down in embarrassment, "I'm sorry. That wasn't fair of me to say."

"I wouldn't do that kid, I wouldn't trust a stranger, let alone a villain, let alone *anyone*, over you," Tony promised him with a firm shake of his head. In a way, that was an apology too. His voice cracked as he swore, "You always come first."

"Obviously not," Peter snarled without thinking. He blinked and straightened, anger washing away as he saw Tony's recoil at his words. Peter winced and put up a hand, "That was...not what I meant."

"Things we don't mean," Tony recalled their statement earlier and classified Peter's words slowly, clearly rattled.

"Yeah," Peter said, eager to move on. "But it still doesn't excuse you making decisions for me," he snapped, his gaze flashing against his will.

"I will always make decisions for you," Tony gave him a look that rivaled his own glare.

Peter realized he wasn't the only one who had built up anger just waiting to be let out. They had had a rough three months, and they were just getting started. Peter remembered what he had said earlier. They needed to fight. This had to happen. He had to get angry again, he had to say stuff he didn't mean, and so did Tony. But this time no one was walking out until they fixed this. That thought gave Peter the encouragement he needed and he stopped trying to hold back his fury.

"Why, because you said so?" Peter demanded angrily.

Tony nodded, "Yes."

"Once again," Peter hissed, taking a step forward, "I didn't ask for you to say anything, and I didn't ask to be protected."

"And once again, if I remember correctly, my next words were: too bad! And I will stand by that!" Tony exclaimed furiously. "And then you tried to punch me!"

"Cause you were being an idiot," Peter said through gritted teeth, "And you still are."

"Well good thing you already got a punch out of your system," Tony sneered.

"I could go for another one right about now," Peter warned him. Tony braced for a split second Peter shook his head, moving to the side with a shake of his head to show they weren't about to get into a fist fight with two broken arms and his opponent sporting a bullet wound. "I get that you wanted to protect me. But sometimes you can't, okay? We kind of established that."

"But I will always try to," Tony countered firmly. "And I will not apologize for that as much as you want me too. Because that is who I am. And that is who you are. You're a teenager who is in way over his head simply because he's Spiderman."

Peter scoffed, "I'm in way over my head? Really? Last time I checked, you admitted you were

wrong when you told me that."

"And you got crushed by a building and nearly killed. You call that a win?" Tony demanded.

Peter's jaw clenched and he seethed, "There you go again. Bringing up my mistakes. Is there any argument where you can't use my faults against me? Do you want me to bring up some of yours?"

"That's not what this is about," Tony countered, his gaze flashing.

"This is always what this is about!" Peter shouted, his fist curling and he raised his hand in exaggeration and spit, "God *forbid* I'm not perfect, and you go call me on it, using it as an excuse to treat me like a kid!"

"You are a kid!" Tony shouted, pointing his finger at him firmly. "And Peter, so help me, you are *my* kid."

Peter stopped, breathing hard as he registered that sentence. In truth, his chest was burning. There was a lot he wanted to say to that, a lot he wanted to admit, but it wasn't the right time. They had a moment of understanding in the silence. He looked down to compose himself, not understanding how confusingly impactful and wonderfully awful it was that they had both just brushed past that statement like it was nothing. Either that was a good thing or a bad thing, or in between, and neither wanted to sit around and discuss it.

Tony spoke first, his voice shaking, "There is not a bone in my body that would purposefully hurt you, or let someone else hurt you."

"Yeah, you kind of proved that," Peter gave him a weak smile. Then he shook his head, "And I would do the same for you. But that was the whole issue here, right? That we're weaker together? That was the problem."

Tony closed his eyes and sighed, "That was something I didn't mean. I was trying to justify-"

"You shouldn't have needed to justify!" Peter said angrily. "You should have talked to me about it."

"I did talk to you about it," Tony hissed.

Peter made a face and chuckled, wagging a finger, "No. No, you left no room in your closed mind for anything but getting me out that door and you turned it into a full fledged argument-"

"Peter," Tony growled.

Peter knew that was unfair and not true but he didn't care. "You think you can protect me, but you can't, okay? This is what this is about. This is about you not accepting the fact that this is life and there are consequences."

Tony's eyes went wide, "You dying is not a consequence I am willing to except! Neither is you getting hurt! I will always protect you, that is my job!"

"Tony, look at me!" Peter yelled, motioning to himself in exasperation. "I've got a broken arm, busted ribs- I am *hurt*. You can't protect me! And I'm not saying you're bad at your job," he added quickly, "If you hadn't been there, I would have died. I'm saying that you cannot physically protect me all the time. We kind of proved that."

"I can try," Tony whispered.

Peter nodded, "Try? Yes. And you do. Of course you do. It's sentimental and sweet and all but Tony, you have to understand, you can't save me. Not every time." Tony's gaze was broken and hurt, and Peter almost regretted what he had just let slip but he was on a roll and this needed to be said. "I will never be safe, no matter what card you play. But pushing me away is not an option, and it backfired, and you need to stop trying to convince yourself you did the right thing. We both went through hell for three months, Tony. Three. And then I got my butt kicked for a week and that I could handle, but what I couldn't handle was the one person who I never wanted to see again just showing up and playing hero."

"I-" Tony stuttered weakly.

"And yeah, we bonded, we fixed one pile in the mountain of crap between us, but we still have issues, Tony! Coming down to it, I will die for you," he insisted firmly. "No matter what. Even during the three months, if I had to die for you, I would have." Peter's expression darkened and he pointed at him with utter fury, "But that does not mean I need to tolerate you right now, and don't think for a second that we are going to snap back to normal," Peter hissed. He was spiraling away from his main point, slowly losing the grip he had on the track but he couldn't stop himself now. There were no breaks to pump.

Tony's face was pale with shock and he nodded slowly, "I- I know."

"Bottom line," Peter mocked him from earlier, an anger rising that he hadn't remembered storing but suddenly it was taking over. His gaze flashed and his fists balled as he swore, "You walked out on *me*. *You* caused the fight."

Peter knew he should stop, he should. But suddenly he felt the fury and dismay of watching Tony walk up those steps and around the corner. He felt the anger when he showed up again and dared to catch him as Peter's legs collapsed underneath him in the hallway, daring to ask for forgiveness. He felt the anger of watching Damian stab the knife into Tony's shoulder and laugh, or smiling when he got to punch Tony in the face when the man had went to go get the remote to unlock Peter's cuffs. He felt the anger that had washed over him and taken control of his body as he rushed the man who had pulled the trigger meant for him, the bullet lodged in someone else's side. And most of all he felt the utter fury of holding that phone in his shaking hand, useless and weak as the gunshot echoed through the speaker.

And so he didn't know what he was saying, he didn't register his words, he just let all of his pain out.

"And now May is dead and I wonder who's fault that was! Or who's fault it was that I got kidnapped in the first place!" Peter screamed, tears starting to fall again as he shook in anger. Tony froze. Peter was too furious to register the amount of pain that washed over the man's face in front of him. He didn't even realize what he had just said. But Tony did. Tony heard him loud and clear and although he searched and searched the kid's gaze for some indication that he hadn't meant what he said, all he got was hate. Peter still hadn't registered his words.

Tony swallowed as Peter stuck a finger to his chest and snarled, "You weren't there. You left me alone, but the minute you heard I was kidnapped you saw a perfect opportunity to come swoop in and save the day, like you always do," he drawled weakly. "You were too busy trying to play hero to make up for all the crap you said to me, and combined with that and some SHIELD bastards who can't do their frickin job-"

Peter stopped, breathing hard. He heard his words in his head and blinked. *Now May is dead and I wonder who's fault that was! Or who's fault it was that I got kidnapped in the first place!*

He had just blamed Tony for May's death.

He had just blamed Tony for him getting kidnapped.

Neither were his fault.

He looked up and saw the man with his lips pursed, his eyes filled with pain. Peter didn't have any words, but Tony did. The man's voice was tight.

"I- I know, kid." His expression was clear, and it shocked Peter to his core. Tony had believed it all along, he just didn't think Peter would say it. Did Tony really blame himself? Not only for Peter being kidnapped, but May's death too? And Peter had just-

Oh God.

Peter blinked and stuttered, "I didn't..." He shook his head, trying to fix what he had just done in a sudden panic, "May wasn't your fault- and neither was me getting kidnapped. If anything, I was reason you got sucked into all of it. I'm sorry..." Peter whimpered, understanding the fullness of what he had just done, how far he had dug in the knife even if the man wasn't showing it. He never showed the guilt, it was just an invisible weight on his shoulders and Peter had just added a massive amount.

Tony didn't answer. He simply clenched his jaw, his muscles tensing and he made a small sound of acknowledgement that seemed strangled.

Peter, the stubborn, angry, broken boy that he was didn't know when to stop. His mouth moved on his own accord, trying to shift the blame, unwilling to get hurt anymore. So he glared and made out, "You hurt me, you-"

"You think I was the only one who said hurtful things?" Tony asked him quietly but calmly, either controlling his anger or just in plain shock.

Peter scoffed, "Yeah, you said the majority of them." He hated himself for how quickly he glazed over what had just happened.

Tony looked down with a nod, "Yeah. Yeah, I suppose you would block some of that stuff out to make yourself feel better."

Peter made a face before he lifted his hand, letting it fall to his side in mockery, "Go for it. Tell me what I said. Tell me one thing. Just one."

Tony's glare went unmatched, only because of the pain that was obvious behind it. "If you don't want me calling you kid anymore, let me know."

Peter frowned, about to shout a retort, when suddenly the fog moved aside and he heard venom inside his voice in his head, *"Don't 'kid' me. I'm not your kid. You're not Ben, and you're not my dad, so stop pretending like you are."* Peter had forgotten he said that. Why would he say that? He wouldn't meet Tony's eyes. Shame ran down his spine and Peter ran a hand over his face. He tried for a snarky smile to hide his feelings and scoffed, "And why did that affect you?"

The man in front of him looked at him incredulously, choking on his words before hissing out, "Take one guess."

Peter and Tony locked gazes for one second before breaking them instantly. Peter turned around, running his hand on the rail on the end of the bed. There was silence for a second and Peter bit his

lip.

"Well what's next?" Tony asked thinly, his voice steady to not reveal any emotion.

Peter's eyes stung with tears and he said over his shoulder, "Tony- I-"

"It's fine," Tony snapped, cutting him off.

"Tony-" Peter insisted.

"Peter," Tony said back sharply, his tone harsh but his eyes begging. "Move on," he said quietly. "Please."

Peter shrank back just slightly and nodded, "O-Okay." He rubbed his nose and murmured, "You said you wished we never met..." Peter gripped the rail hard, denting it like clay around his tight grasp. He removed his hand, wincing at the warped metal. "Did you mean that?"

"No," Tony said instantly.

Peter nodded, trying to cover up his sigh in relief. If he remembered the events in order correctly, he would be right in mumbling, "And then you..." he trailed off. Tony knew what he did, Peter didn't need to say it again. He had already made everything worse. So he turned around and said firmly, "I'm sorry I didn't stop you."

"And I'm sorry I ever took that first step away from you," Tony said back.

Peter felt tears come to his eyes and he tried to blink them away as he nodded. Then he said, "I broke that day, you know. I got home late and just- collapsed."

"From now on, I will always catch you," Tony promised. "I swear." Peter smiled so very slightly.

"Nat said you did what you did because you cared about me too much," Peter said slowly.

Tony made a face and sighed, "Well Romanoff always knew me pretty well."

"Why did you show up on that street during that fight, Tony? Why did you help me out and then meet me back at my building?" Peter asked, his eyes wide and questioning.

Tony shrugged, and walked a couple feet forward to close some distance, like he didn't want to lose Peter even to a couple paces away. "I saw you get thrown into a wall and I don't know, Pete. I just- I couldn't fail you again, so I went to try and fix things. I went to try and apologize and- and help you. I thought we had a shot but then..." Tony looks up in confusion and asked hesitantly, "Were you really fine without me?"

"No," Peter says, half sobbing. The fact that he even considered that as a possibility- "No. No, I wasn't."

"So was it really too late for me to apologize?" Tony asked gently.

"No," Peter cried again. "I just couldn't- I wasn't thinking, and I was so angry. I stopped myself every time I wanted to get in the ball park of even talking about what happened and trying to fix things. I was too...stubborn."

Tony looks down and smiles, "You get that from me." Peter smirks and wipes his eye with the back of his sleeve. "You know I care about you getting hurt...right?"

It was a stupid question, but Peter had dismissed it three months earlier, refusing to believe that Tony did. But of course he did. He never stopped. He should have known that. Peter nodded before he chuckled, "Damian didn't get a broken nose and finger for nothing." Tony smiled at that but stayed silent. Peter rocks on the balls of his feet before he announced, "I said I was okay to you. I said I was fine without you. That was a lie, I just couldn't bring myself to admit it. Maybe if I had just-" he searches for the right words, "maybe we could have talked it out but I didn't, and I'm sorry."

"I tried to apologize," Tony said weakly before he scoffed, "but I just couldn't say it out loud. That was on me."

"It was on both of us," Peter corrected. "I shot you down before you could even get a chance," he admitted quietly. Peter scratched the back of his neck and mumbled, "I- I sat on the floor against the door for about an hour. I couldn't move, I could barely breathe, I- I just...wanted you to know that."

Tony smiles weakly and raises an eyebrow as if in amusement, "Well Damian was right about us being similar. I sat on the steps." Peter looks up in shock and Tony nods before he frowns. "And then I went home and drank. And then, after that, I had the worst three months of my life, and that's saying something considering I was kidnapped by terrorists back in 08."

Peter takes a deep breath, "I wanted to text you. I wrote stuff and then I deleted it. I had my finger over the call button at least a dozen times. And then it all just got...numb. I tried to forget it all, and move on, but I couldn't. And then there was Flash and-"

Tony's head shot up, his eyes narrowed, "What about him?"

"He...always bullied me," Peter shrugged like it was no big deal before he winced and looked down, suddenly interested with the floor. "But I guess he saw me as weaker than usual, because now I wouldn't fight back. So...even school was hell."

"Did you tell anyone?" Tony whispered angrily, his gaze fierce.

Peter snorted, "Yeah my imaginary friend. Who am I supposed to tell, my mom and dad?" He shook his head, rubbing his hair, "Nah, May was..." he was smiling sadly before he suddenly felt a chill go down his spine and his face went slack.

Oh God, she was dead. Peter sucked in a breath, biting his cheek. He had started talking about her so casually before he realized that he had lost her forever. His hand started shaking and Peter clenched it hard, trying to steady himself. He twitched his nose, blinking to stop the tears from forming. A lump formed in his throat and he tried to speak past it but his voice still trembled. "May-" He cleared his throat, desperate to just get past her name, "May was working, and I didn't want to worry her. And you...weren't an option."

"I'm sorry," Tony said sincerely. He raised an eyebrow, "I can get him kicked out of school?"

Peter smirks and shrugs it off, "It's okay."

"It's not," Tony says simply, giving him a pointed look.

Peter makes a face and asks, "Does it matter?" It hadn't to him. With everything that he had been going through Flash was the least of his problems. Yeah, he came home with a couple black eyes and bruises every once in a while, but May wasn't there to see them, so Peter tried to ignore them. The pain kept him focused, and it was nothing compared to what Peter was currently feeling. And

maybe it was all his fault. He hadn't done enough because Tony had still left. Tony hadn't wanted him. He had screwed up. So...so maybe he deserved it. Some physical pain actually helped him once in a while, especially since he hadn't been putting on the suit as often. Of course he wouldn't tell Tony that...at least not right now. Why? Because Peter didn't think it mattered.

"To matters to me, yeah," Tony nods firmly, looking at him like he had lost his mind. Well for three months he had lost a lot more than his mind.

Peter feels his eyes sting again and he screws them shut tight, biting his cheek. "Three whole months, Tony," he said brokenly, lofting his hand up, "I saw your picture on every billboard, every magazine at the bus stop, I heard your name on the news, saw you doing interviews on TV-"

"Well I am popular," Tony tried to joke, before he saw the expression on Peter's face.

"Three months of thinking that I would never see you again because you wanted nothing to do with me, that you wished you never met me, that you didn't care about me. Whenever I put that suit on, Tony-" Peter pressed his palm against his head and gulped down a sob. He grit his teeth, curling his fist and pushing words through his clenched jaw, "And I tried so hard to just move on, and pretend that was another life, one that I never wanted to go back to. And deep down I knew that I had walked away too, I hadn't talked to you that night, I had shut you out. You were gone, May was gone, and I just fell apart, Tony and I've never been so lost in my entire life-" Peter stumbled backwards, sinking down onto the bed.

A tear trickled down Tony's cheek as he saw the pain he caused the kid and he wiped it away before Peter could notice. "Peter, I-" He had nothing to say. No excuse.

"I let people call me Pete," Peter mumbled.

Tony blinked. The past few sentences, Peter's voice was worn down and choked by pain and sadness and anger. Just then Peter had just sounded...broken, like that was the worst thing of all.

Tony swallowed and took a step forward, speaking hesitantly, "Peter, it's okay-"

The kid's head snapped up and his gaze flashed, "No. No, it's not okay. I used to correct everyone because only you called me that. Only you. And then Flash started calling me it and I- I didn't correct him, and something just felt so...wrong," Peter cried, looking up at him through the tears. "But I couldn't stop people. God- even Toomes called me it," Peter broke at that, putting his head down to his chest. "I- I didn't correct him, Tony...Tony, I didn't correct him-"

"Peter, hey, Peter!" Tony said instinctively, and the kid's gaze raised and God- it looked so innocent. He gripped the boy's shoulder to steady him, "When I came and got you out of there I called you Pete and you weren't really awake yet, you were still half conscious but you know what you said to me?"

"What?" Peter whispered, and Tony didn't ignore how the kid leaned into his touch.

"You told me only Tony got to call you Pete," Tony said quietly. Peter's eyes widened with hope and Tony gave his good shoulder a small squeeze, "So maybe you just kicked the crap out of Toomes too early for you to tell him that, huh?" Tony grinned. Peter smiled and looked down, Tony reaching without thinking and ruffling his hair. He let his hand fall as soon as he realized. They both froze. It was an old habit, but it grew to mean something...things that they weren't capable of saying, or maybe didn't even want to say to each other. Tony didn't even feel like he was allowed to do it and he took a step backward. "Sorry," Tony mumbled simply, straightening.

"One good thing about the three months," Peter smiled lightly. "My hair wasn't as messy." Tony chuckled and Peter scratched his knee, "That was about the only good thing though."

"Yeah," Tony said quietly. "I wanted to text you too but I thought...I thought you didn't care."

"Tony..." Peter felt the tears coming again and he lowered his head to his chest, crying. "It sucked. For three whole months-"

"I know," Tony whispered.

"For three whole months I just- my grades slipped. I got my first B," Peter laughed, shaking his head. "Can you believe that? I got my first B. I actually went to decathlon though! Because I needed to keep busy. Crime went up a couple percentage points because I was busy, I didn't go out with my suit as much. Because when I did was reminded of what happened, and how much I screwed up. And then May was gone and I was just...alone. I was alone, Tony."

"I'm sorry," Tony said, his voice breaking. "Peter I am so, so sorry."

Peter rubbed his eye with the back of his fist, biting his lip, "And now you're apologizing."

Tony's brow furrowed and he stuttered, "I- I thought that was the whole point of this. Is that a bad thing?"

Peter shakes his head before tugging at his messy curls. Then he shrugs, "After everything that happened, Tony, there were days where the only way I could go to sleep was to think about this moment, where we tried to talk things out and you apologized. I thought once you did we could just go back to normal," Peter had tears streaming down his cheeks as he made out, "but I am still so mad at you."

He meets Tony's eyes then and the man can see the anger in them, three months of it, all built up and burning, not planning to extinguish any time soon. Then the hateful expression breaks and he whispers, "And you have every right to be mad at me. Because I screwed up too. But I- I almost feel like-" Peter shook his head. "What kept me going through those three months was how pissed I was. It was anger. And now that that's gone I have nothing to fall back on. The rug has been yanked out from under me too many times and I just- I can't do it anymore, I can't."

Tony stayed where he was, but he said firmly, "We'll work it out, kid."

"You don't understand," Peter sobbed, shoving his hand off, his entire body shaking. "I have no idea what I'm doing, or what to do. I am a mess, Tony, and- this- all of this- I just- I can't. I spent three months trying to forget you and now I can't. But God, I want to. I want to just go back because I can't do this, Tony-"

Tony straightens and starts to step back in shock, processing what the kid just said but Peter's hand shoots out and grabs his sleeve. He hears the kid whimper as he winces, "I didn't mean that, I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm saying. I just wish I could put both feet on the ground for once, and I haven't been able to and I just-" Peter's hand falls from Tony's sleeve but the man doesn't move away. He understands.

Peter curls his hand into a fist, pressing it hard against his mouth as he ducks his head. "May is gone. And I- I miss her, Tony. And I don't even really feel it yet," he admits weakly. "And that scares me. Because what's gonna happen to me when I do feel it? If this is bad, then..." Right now Peter was numb and it hurt more than he could bear. What happens when the dam breaks?

"I'll be there for you," Tony promises. "When it hits you I'll be right there with you. I promise. No

matter what."

Peter gives him a small smile but it's quickly choked by emotions and Tony sees the kid's fist curl tighter, his breathing starting to speed up. "I wish I wasn't Spiderman. I wish I had talked to you. I wish I had hit send. I wish I had convinced you not to walk out those doors, I wish I stopped you. I wish I had done everything differently-"

"Peter, stop-" Tony pleaded with him, taking a step forward.

"No! No, you stop! You don't understand!" Peter yelled in anger, wanting to block everything out because this was his problem, he had to deal with it.

"I am the only one who understands!" Tony shouted back. Peter's head shot up and Tony's expression softened. His voice was gentle, "Kid, I was lost without you too, ever think about that? I haven't drank since I met you and I went back to those same bad habits. I certainly didn't sleep, I locked myself in the lab- I know exactly what you went through, because I did the same thing!"

"It was your fault!" Peter screamed, tears streaming down his cheeks as he shoved himself upright. He needed someone to take the blame. He needed Tony to, as much as it pained him to put more weight on the man's shoulders. He didn't want to carry it. He wanted to deflect it.

"I know," Tony said, his voice breaking off. They had a silent understanding as the weight shifted, Peter throwing it as hard as he could, desperate to get as far away from it as possible, Tony doing his best to catch it even though it weighed him down. Because that's what he would do for Peter.

"All your fault-" Peter hissed brokenly, unable to stop himself. "And I am not going to apologize for jumping in front of that glider, I would do it again and again and again until I die!" Peter yelled, shoving the table next to his bed. It clattered to the floor, its contents spilling against the ground, a glass shattering.

Tony straightened at that, anger clear in his gaze. He glared and shook his head, "No. You won't die for me. You won't get hurt for me, mark my words, Parker-"

"TOUGH!" Peter yelled, his cheeks wet.

"TOO MANY PEOPLE HAVE DIED FOR ME!" Tony shouted; now it was his turn to explode, shaking in anger. His voice lowered and he swore, "You- kid, you will not be one of them."

"I just might," Peter sneered. "Because face it, Tony, people care about you. Is that so awful? But you don't walk out on them, you don't turn around and leave when things get tough, you don't turn around and walk up the steps and around the corner, abandoning them, ditching them, dumping them-"

"I get it!" Tony screamed in fury, flinching at each word Peter used.

Peter wasn't finished, "You didn't! You left! Family. Doesn't. Do. That. You stick through it and you bite your tongue and you *deal with it*!"

"Deal with-" Tony repeated in disbelief, running a hand over his face and snarling, "Okay, fine, and if you had died, what, was I just supposed to deal with it?"

"Yes!" Peter shouted back, slamming his fist down on the bed so hard he dented the bottom underneath the mattress.

Tony shook his head, his eyes flashing and he shouted, "No! I can't lose you kid!"

"You might!" Peter yelled.

"I CAN'T!" Tony screamed back.

"You DID!" Peter exploded. "For THREE MONTHS, Tony- you did lose me me! Because you walked out! You don't do that! And the worst part is that you are still trying to convince me that you did it to protect me but you've got to accept the fact that I will never see it that way, don't you get that?" He sobbed, barely able to see through his tears that turned his vision blurry. "I will never understand why you did it because nothing good came out of it! We both fell apart, we both almost died because of it, so don't you ask me to understand, don't you ask me to try and see your side of the story because I never want to!"

Tony was fuming, but he refused to look at the kid with hate. He shook his head and muttered, "Peter-"

There was suddenly a huge crash and when he looked up out of shock, he saw the bed overturned; Peter had flipped it with a simple flick of his wrist. The kid stormed forward, tears suddenly falling faster. He was furious, his fist balled and he walked right up to Tony, his chest burning, his lungs tight and throat hoarse as he yelled, "THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR WHAT YOU DID, NO DEFENSE, AND YOU KNOW IT!"

Peter was breathing hard, his eyes flashing. Everything had just snapped. Three months of fury had all just come crashing down. There was no need for that sentence because he knew Tony had his own reasons. But not in his mind. There would never be a justifiable reason in his mind and he felt the sudden need to let Tony know that. Why? Because of the many nights he spent staying awake and having a panic attack, asking himself that question, because of every single time Tony's name was mentioned and Peter flinched, because of the shock of seeing him pushed into that room and Tony looking at him like he was the only thing he cared about in the world, even though this was the same man who walked up those stairs and left.

"I WAS COVERED IN YOUR BLOOD!" Tony yelled back, shaking with emotion. He was furious, he was more angry than Peter had ever seen him. There they were again, looking at each other with hate, but there was an undying bond that was starting to make itself known. Tony's voice broke as he hissed, "Because I held you while blood seeped through my fingers from a wound that I thought would kill you while your breathing got weaker and weaker and you grew heavy in my arms, bleeding out from a glider meant for me-"

Peter surged forward and grabbed his collar, gripping it hard and moving Tony backward as he pressed forward, "You are not the only one who had to go through that. But instead of a glider it was a bullet." Tears fell freely down his cheeks and Peter shook his head as he cried out, "I was covered in *your* blood. I held *you* while blood seeped through *my* fingers from a wound that I thought would kill you while *your* breathing got weaker and weaker and *you* grew heavy in my arms, bleeding out from a bullet meant for *me*, you son of a-"

Peter cut himself off and just stared for a second, as emotions crashed into him in waves. He blinked and lowered his head, his hand unclasping from Tony's collar and curling into a fist. He dragged it slowly down Tony's chest until it fell. They were mere inches apart but he had yet to raise his gaze.

Tony spoke first, his voice soft but shaking, "And you know how it felt. You told me Peter, you told me you knew how it felt. Do you remember what it felt like? Because I saw the look on your face kid..."

The pain of knowing this is what it felt like, when Tony had held him in his arms, covered in Peter's

blood, made him want to drop to his knees in shock and just let the world fall around him. To know this was the pain that Tony felt when he carried him, when he slipped his hand under his legs and around his back and Peter's head fell limp against his chest. To know that Peter, so many months ago, had been crying out same as Tony- to actually hear those sounds come from the mouth of the person you were supposed to protect. Peter suddenly wanted Tony to have never found him or even gone looking for him; he'd rather be tortured for eternity than have the bullet that was meant for him, sink into Tony's side.

He suddenly wished Tony was anywhere but here.

He suddenly wished-

Oh.

Oh.

"Look, it wasn't the right move, I know that," Tony admits. "If I could take it back, I would. But do you understand even a fraction of why I did it? It wasn't to hurt you, kid, I swear. It was just...after going through what I did with you I just never wanted it to happen again-"

"I know," Peter admitted quietly. He looks up, his gaze riddled with pain but understanding. He and Tony lock eyes and the man takes a deep breath as he hears words through Peter's gaze. It was a feeling he wasn't used to, because they had lost their ability for the longest time, but now it was back. Peter felt it too, as they had a near hour conversation in the span of three seconds, saying everything that they wouldn't dare say out loud, expression feelings they were too stubborn to let show. The pain was evident. But the urge to make up overcame all the agony and anger that had been weighing them down for three months.

Because they were sick and tired of the pain. They were sick and tired of all of it. So when the conversation was done, they lapsed into silence, real silence. Complete silence.

"You know what it feels like," Tony repeated softly, his voice weak.

"Yes," Peter whispered, not stepping back. He was going to nod but his head felt heavy against his chest, and he didn't raise it.

"Peter, I-" Tony said brokenly. His voice made something click. Everything clicked in that instant.

Peter looked up at him with tears in his eyes and he nodded, "I know." He meant it. Tony gave him a look...a timid, concerned, pleading, worried, nervous, pain filled and guilty look. He was gonna say he was sorry. But the thing was, he didn't need to say it. He didn't need to. So Peter assured him, "And I think we've said sorry enough."

"You think?" Tony asked nervously. He knew the man would apologize a million times to make it right, which meant he didn't need to at all.

Peter nodded and spoke firmly, "Yeah." His gaze solidified it, and three months of anger, of hate, just dissolved into thin air. The pit in his stomach disappeared, the aching in his chest eased and he could suddenly breathe right.

"Because I am," Tony said quietly. Peter felt his shoulders relax and when he looked at Tony he saw a weight was lifted off of his chest too.

Peter gave him a small smile, "I know. Me too. And...and I mean that." Peter knew he had screwed up too, and he wasn't going to run anymore. He wasn't going to deflect the blame, or be a coward.

That wasn't what May would want. That wasn't what Spiderman would do. That wasn't the kind of person he was. But as he reached for the weight to take it off of Tony's shoulders, it disappeared.

Their gazes locked and Peter felt his chest heat up. Something that had been broken for a very long time now just got patched up. For the first time in a long time, the glass held. The shattered pieces were swept away, gone, but not forgotten. The pain was still there, but their undeniable, unhealthy, codependent relationship fixed a majority of it. They stare at each other, gazes locked with millions of different emotions, all being expressed at the same time. They've never looked at each other this way before, because nothing like this has happened. They've gotten into fights sure, but nothing like this.

They overcame this. They overcame something that would have torn other people apart. They didn't even realize it. There was so much relief. So much love. Bridges being rebuilt that were previously burned down. Harsh words and horrible memories that had been scorched into their brains replaced with apologies. Still stubbornness remained that blinded them to the real underlying reason they had had the argument in the first place.

One could not live without the other. They would die for each other, chose each other over everything, and always find their way back. Of course, they would never admit that, not yet at least. There was nothing else to it, in their mind, just a cut and dry fight. The sheet of bulletproof glass that was solidified by a year of protectiveness and love had been broken, but not shattered completely.

And now, the glass that had been shattered, suddenly fixes itself. Their bond could never be broken.

Peter looks down and winces, "Sorry about...that," he gestured towards the bed and rail.

"Hey, I missed you breaking stuff," Tony shrugged, and funny enough it looked like he meant it which made Peter snicker. "At least we weren't in the lab where all the expensive stuff is," Tony joked.

Peter smiled slightly before he rubbed his nose, "So...what now? Should we...talk about...what we were talking about before all this?"

Tony ran a hand through his hair, "Do you want to?"

"I- there's not much to talk about is there?" Peter asked slowly. "Just...one question."

Tony sighed, "Well can we ask it sitting down, because I was fueled on adrenaline for the past twenty minutes and the Tylenol is wearing off."

Peter instantly was at his side, pulling the bed forward as Tony leaned against it, clasping his hand against his ribs. Peter made sure he eased onto the bed as much as he could with one arm before he hesitantly sat next to him, his gaze wary and alert.

"It's not just one question, you know," Tony informed him. "There's a lot to say."

Peter's brow furrowed, "Is there?"

"Well..." Tony mumbled, "I don't know how much you know."

"I know a lot," Peter informed him.

"Oh yeah?" Tony grinned.

"Yeah," Peter smiled.

Tony reached and ruffled his hair and for the first time in three months it hadn't felt weird. Peter felt his shoulders relax and he felt his lips curl into a content smile. Tony opened his mouth to speak when suddenly the door crashed open and a kid came barreling in.

"PETER!"

Peter's eyes widened and he looked at Tony, as if for permission to leave his side. Tony grinned and nodded his head forward and Peter slipped off the bed and rushed to meet his friend with a happy cry of, "NED!" But before the kid turned his head he caught a good look at the gaze he was sporting. There was happiness, that was clear, but it was a polar opposite from the look he had been wearing earlier. Peter's gaze had been happy but it had been truthful- Tony could see the pain, the fear, the nervousness, the sadness and the anxiety in his eyes. When Ned showed up, the happiness was genuine, as it should be, but the rest of the stuff was pushed down, compressed and hidden, like Peter just flipped a switch and hid it all.

He'd talk about it later. Peter hadn't been willing to go into more detail of what happened during his three months either, but Tony didn't want to jeopardize the ending result of their talk they finally had. He would save that for later as well.

Peter sort of half stumbled forward and Tony tensed behind him as the kid stepped on his ankle wrong but luckily Ned was already there to catch his friend in a hug, wary of his broken arm. Peter hugged him hard and Tony couldn't help but have his chest heat up. He remembered when he had hugged Peter like that, and it hurt to know that they wouldn't be doing that for a while.

Ned registered the fact that Tony was there and his expression turned from happy to wary. He remembered where Peter had been sitting and he put up his hands, moving away from Peter, "I'm not interrupting anything, right?"

"No," Peter laughed.

Tony winced but hid it well and shook his head, faking a smile to conceal the pain (well that's where Peter got it from). "No. You're fine."

"Ok, good," Ned sighed in relief, exclaiming, "You're back! You're hurt! I-" he spluttered, holding his friend at arm's length, the kid giddy with excitement, his eyes shining with relief and concern as he saw Peter's injuries.

Peter laughed, "Hi, yes, I'm back. Thanks to you I heard! You helped the Avengers sneak in, you tech whiz!"

"Guy in the chair," Ned grinned.

Peter chuckled, "Guy in the chair," he agreed. "And as for me, I'm fine."

"Fine?" Ned demanded angrily, giving him an eyebrow raise and a scoff, "You're not fine! You look like you just fought Captain America and lost and then got run over by a train or something! Did that actually happen?"

"No," Peter laughed. "A bunch of...other stuff did, that I am not about to get into. Changing the subject, you helped them find me, didn't you?"

"He was the one who called me," Tony announced brightly from behind them. "I just couldn't tell you because I didn't want Damian tracking him."

"Who's Damian?" Ned questioned, his eyes narrowing. "I have a feeling he's a bad guy. Was he a bad guy? Is he dead?"

"Yes and yes," Peter said weakly. "It's fine. We're out now. Thanks, man. I owe you one, seriously."

Ned smiled and pulled his friend in for another tight hug, "I knew something was wrong the minute you didn't show up for the chem test!"

Peter clasped his shoulder with his good arm, "You're right dude, I would have never missed that." He raised an eyebrow, "Did Steve let you in?"

Ned nodded, "Yeah. Captain America let me in to the Avengers compound. This might very well be one of the greatest days of my life. After the day I got Captain America's phone number- no actually that day sucked because that was the day that I found out you were taken so scratch that. I have Captain America's phone number," he exclaimed happily. "I was gonna come see you at the hospital but Rhodey- yeah I have his phone too," he announced cockily, his giddiness making Peter smirk, "but he said they had you guys closed off and that you were leaving so then I convinced my mom to let me come here, and now...I'm here. I have to leave soon though, which is a bummer, I just wanted to make sure they didn't rescue an evil clone of you and not the real...you."

Peter smiled, "I'm the real me."

"How many legos were in the Death Star we built?" Ned questioned.

Peter sighs, "3,803."

"I just had to make sure!" Ned laughs, giving him another hug. "Well my job is done. You're not an evil clone. When do you think you'll be back in school?"

Peter falters and he stutters, "I- I don't know, Ned. But you're welcome here any time. I'm not...going back to the apartment...for a while."

Ned's gaze falls and he closes the distance between him and his friend, mumbling, "I didn't want to bring it up...Steve told me. I'm so sorry, Peter. If there's anything I can do..."

Peter ducks his head into his friend's shoulder and gives it a tight squeeze, "Thanks, man." His voice breaks; Tony can hear it from where he's sitting. "I'll text you- once I- get another phone-" Peter rubs his hair with a sigh, "I don't know when that will be-"

"By the time you get home you'll get a text," Tony announces. "I got you covered, Pete."

Peter looks back at him and gives him a thankful smile, "Thanks Tones."

Tony perks up at the nickname Peter hadn't used in a couple months and they both catch Ned's eye who is looking back and forth between them with a knowing smirk, interrupting their small moment.

Ned points to the two of them and grins hopefully, giving a hopeful but wavering thumbs up as he slowly asks, "I take it things are fixed?"

"Getting there," Tony assures him, giving Peter a nod. The kid smiles in return.

"Good. Cause you both were a mess without each other. Everyone could see it. It was about time you came to your senses," he announced.

Peter looks at him in shock before turning to glance over his shoulder at Tony who sighs and points, "He's our therapist apparently."

"Yeah," Ned agrees.

"Got it," Peter says slowly with a shrug, giving his friend a warm smile.

Ned points to the door, holding out his hand, "Well I gotta go."

Tears prick Peter's eyes as he holds out his good hand and does their handshake as best he can with a broken arm. They linger on the last shake and then Ned gives him another hug and Peter whispers, "Thank you, Ned."

"Anything for my best friend," Ned smiles. "And...I'm so, so sorry Peter." His voice is sincere and Peter gives him a nod of appreciation.

He speaks back with a hushed tone, "Yeah, man. I'll be okay."

Ned clasps his shoulder, "If you need anything, just text me, or have Captain America text me, since," Ned straightens his shirt and cocks his head, "I have his number." He wiggles his eyebrows.

Peter laughs and waves him off, "Yeah, yeah."

Ned gives him a nod and then points to both of them and says, "Take care of him."

Tony frowns, "Who were you talking to?"

Ned grins, "Exactly." He waves and walks out, the door closing behind him.

Tony has been hiding the pain for a while now, but he can't anymore. It feels like Damian is digging the knife in again, this time in his stomach, crushing ribs and playing with the bottom of his stomach which makes him want to throw up. His eyesight had been clear for a majority of the time but it was starting to get fuzzy and when blinking harshly didn't clear it, he knew he needed another dose of the pills he was avoiding taking. He is unable to stop himself from letting out a groan as he swings his legs over the side of the bed

In a flash Peter is holding him back and demanding, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" The kid's grip is gentle but still firm, stopping him from going any further. His gaze is filled with concern, his eyes wide.

"I need some pain killers," Tony announces, waving his good hand toward the cabinet. "I'm getting them. Get off."

"Uh, yeah, no," Peter shakes his head, forcing him back down gently, "I'll get it. What do you want? Motrin?"

Tony shoots him a look and scoffs, "God no. There's something seriously wrong with giving a grown man Motrin."

"Yes there's something seriously wrong with you," Peter counters, interrupting him as he goes over to the cabinet, both of them talking over one another.

"I'm not on my cycle, Peter!" Tony exclaims, and the door opens again.

"Now where have I heard that one before?"

Tony looks up and breathes a sigh of relief. He sees the fiery red hair before he even registers the voice he knows and loves, "Pepp."

She crosses the room instantly and hugs him. Tony reaches to cup her cheek and they kiss, Tony's good arm wrapping around her back. Pepper pulls away and moves some of his hair aside, subtly wiping her eyes. "You're lucky you're not dead. I would have killed you."

Tony smirks, "Good to know. Does that mean you missed me?"

Pepper gives him a look as she examines him and glances over his worst wounds. Her voice is tight, "I didn't have time to miss you. I didn't even know you were gone," she growled.

Tony winces, "Well I would have told you...but...kidnapped."

Pepper smiles before leaning down to kiss him again, her hands running over his chest, "You sure you're okay?"

Tony winces as she brushes the bullet wound and her arm recoils as she raises an eyebrow. He reaches and entwines his fingers with hers, giving her a nod before leaning forward to peck her on the cheek. "I'll be fine."

"Good, now hold on. I have my other boy to go hug," she says, rubbing his arm before turning around and meeting Peter's eyes.

"Hi, Pepper," he says slowly, giving her a small smile.

The woman returns the warm gesture and crosses the room. She reaches forward and cups Peter's cheek, lowering her voice, "I know you're mad at me. I have my own apology to make because I was involved with this too." Then her expression softens and she pleads, "But can I please give you a hug and then you can go back to being mad at me?"

Peter can't say no so he steps forward and Pepper wraps her arms around him, giving him a loving embrace. "I heard about May, sweetie. I am so so sorry."

Peter is the one who tightens the hug in a moment of weakness. Pepper had always been like a second mom to him. When he stayed late, she would make them dinner and watch Star Wars with them. He hung out with her when Tony was in a meeting, and asked her for math homework help a couple of times. If May had left, this compound was his home, and Pepper always made him feel welcome. That was all he cared about right now. He knew she cared.

"Thanks," he whispered.

"And if you need anything," she assured him, pulling back and rubbing his good shoulder, "just ask. I'm really glad you're okay, Peter. You are okay, right?" Her eyes speak an apology that they agree to talk about at another time.

Peter shrugs, "Yeah, I'll be swinging in no time."

Pepper smirks, "Of course. I'm sorry I couldn't help with your rescue. I hadn't exactly known about it." Her tone goes thin and her eyes narrow.

Peter chuckles slightly. Right. Steve was screwed. "It's okay," he assures her.

"Speaking of that," Tony calls from his bed, sitting up with effort. "What happened to Steve?" he dares to ask.

Pepper purses her lips, a flash of anger flaring in her eyes that matches her red hair. She sighs and reaches the top shelf and grabs the bottle of medicine, tossing it to Peter who walks over and hands two to Tony who grabs for the bottle. Peter curses and nearly smacks his hand, "Absolutely not-you need water first."

"No I don't," Tony rolls his eyes.

Peter looks back at Pepper for help and she snaps, "Listen to the kid."

Tony scowls, glaring at Peter who has a triumphant smile. "Fine. But you tell me what happened to Cap."

"He's dead," Pepper announces happily, putting her hands on her hips after closing the cabinet. Peter and Tony both look at her pointedly and she puts her hands up in surrender, "Fine, fine, he's not dead. Although he will be, if he decides to keep me in the dark again." Tony waits with a raised eyebrow and Peter clears his throat and Pepper sighs, "He's got a black eye, I locked his Netflix account and blocked his wifi. And he's on cleaning duty for the next six months."

Peter lets out a whoop and Tony hisses, "Harsh."

"Hey, I rule with an Iron fist," Pepper smiles.

Tony raises an eyebrow, "Technically I do." Pepper gives him a look and he smiles, "But you, tell me where that fist goes, my wonderful, stunning, smart-" Tony pops the pain meds in his mouth and gulps down the glass of water Peter hands him.

"Getting there," Pepper teases. She walks over and sits down on the edge of the bed, putting her hand on Tony's knee. She looks at the both of them and narrows her eyes, trying to read the relationship. "How are you too doing?" She puts up a hand, "And don't say fine. I've had enough lies this past week to last me a lifetime."

Peter and Tony exchange looks. Peter answers. His voice is small but firm, "We're getting there. We talked."

Pepper's eyes widen and she nods, "Good. Good, that's good." She patted Peter's hand that was resting on the bed and she stood, "I'll let you two talk more, I'm sure that you guys weren't done, but I saw Ned run out and thought now would be a better time rather than later."

"You weren't worried about me?" Tony pouts.

"You get yourself in the worst situations, Tony. And you always end up fine," she said, but Peter smiles because he could tell Pepper had been furious with Steve, and worried as heck.

"You sure you didn't shed any tears when you found out I was okay?" Tony prided innocently.

"Tears of joy," Pepper corrects. "I didn't have to go job hunting." She gave him another kiss before she stood up, squeezing Peter's shoulder. "I'll let you guys get back to talking."

"Pepper," Peter blurted out, jumping to his feet.

She turned around immediately, asking, "Yeah?"

"I-" Peter stuttered nervously before he made a face and pointed, "Tony has something to ask you."

Tony cursed, "Excuse me, what?"

"Well-" Peter started.

Pepper smiled, "Yes."

Tony frowned, "You don't even know what we're gonna ask yet."

Pepper smirked, "Yes. Yes I do." She looks pointedly at them. "Peter, you've always had a home here anyway. So it's up to you, kid. And I think you guys need to do a little more talking," she said knowingly. "But yes, I'm on board. I know exactly what you're talking about. Legally, it all depends on who's on the will," she said quietly, wincing at Peter's expression, but he understood; it needed to be said. Then she smiled again, her eyes sparkling, "But I am more than okay with it, that's my answer. I think it's up to the both of you now."

Tony and Peter's jaws dropped and Pepper laughed, waving as she left the room.

Peter turned to Tony incredulously, "How did she-"

"It's Pepper," Tony sighed. "I've learned not to question it. She knows everything. That's why she's so scary."

"Ok," Peter admitted, sitting down next to Tony on the bed. "So...what now?"

Tony bit his lip. He was pretty sure Peter was a little nervous. This was a lot to go over on the first day back from what they had been through. They needed a break. Tony's stomach suddenly ached and he realized they both hadn't eaten in a while. That could work. "Do you want to get cheeseburgers first?"

Peter broke into a grin and nodded vigorously, "Yeah. Yeah, that actually sounds really good."

"Cheeseburgers it is," Tony announced, happily.

"Tony?" Peter asked shyly as the man reached for the phone.

He turned and looked at him over his shoulder. The expression on the boy's face made him stop what he was doing and turn fully towards him. Tony's voice was gentle and questioning as he asked, "Yeah, kid?"

Peter gave him a small smile and mumbled, "*Thanks.*"

Tony shrugged and made a face, "They're only like two dollars and the cheese is made of chemicals-"

Peter groaned, growing red in the face as he put a hand to his forehead, muttering, "That's not what I-"

Tony ruffled his hair and winked, "I know."

"You know?" Peter asked, as if just to make sure. The kid's gaze was precious, trusting, innocent, and....in so much pain. They had a lot to go through in the coming days, but at least they were talking. At least they were slowly getting back into the groove. Tony realized they had just argued twice, not full out fights, but the typical back and forth banter that usually took up most of their day. They weren't glaring at each other. They weren't getting shot. They weren't about to die.

Tony knew there was no way they would go back to what they were like before the whole Goblin incident, because it just wasn't possible. Too many things had changed. But he would get as close

as he could, because this was Peter. This was them. And they were mending. For the first time in the past three months Tony could honestly say he was happy. Yeah, he had a gunshot wound, and a broken shoulder, a stab- he'll stop. But he was truly happy. All because the kid next to him was willing to forgive him, to try to understand, to try and take the next step to where they could move on. Heck, even go as far as to become his legal son.

But all Tony cared about was that Peter was trusting him again, he was looking at him again, without anger. He could ruffle the kid's hair and call him Pete without feeling a dark pit in his stomach. And they could communicate without speaking again, through gazes. It was a start, and Tony was welcoming it with open arms and praying it lasted. Of course it would last. They lasted. Because no matter what happened, underneath it all, there still remained a certainly undeniable (obviously) and unhealthy (but who cared) codependent relationship. Tony had let it go once. He wasn't going to make that mistake ever again.

Tony's heart ached and he gave him a nod, nudging him in the good shoulder, "I always know."

Chapter End Notes

Tadaaaaaaaaa cheeseburgers. Ugh this all melts my heart and I hope it does the same for you. ANYWAY!!! They're not completely done fighting, there will be a few small sparks but nothing too big. They've made it clear they want to make up and did for the most part. Hope that met your expectations I rly want feedback <3

Thank you all for reading, a lot to come don't worry. Next chapter a lil preview, Peter may throw some more punches, we check in on Steve and see how he's doing, the will is gonna be read, and we get a visit from a huge favorite: General Thunderbolt Ross! And ofc more iron dad and spider son and some angst and comfort stuff obviously lol If theres anything you want to see lmk :)))

I really enjoyed writing this chapter and it seemed like it went by fast, sorry if it seemed like a long wait i know I kept you guys on the edge of your seat. Next couple weeks are hectic but I will try my best to stick to the 5/6 day posting schedule. I hope you all are having a great day and week! You all are amazing and awesome and as you can probably tell I'm super hyper. OKAY! Get sleep uhhh drink coffee (at different times though because fun fact, coffee and sleep dont mix). Anyway that's all I have for you guys lol until next time! Drop a comment i love hearing from you anddddd yeah!!!

I love you all 3000 <3 <3

What I Would Do For You Means Everything

Chapter Notes

HI MY LOVELY LOVELY READERS! I know this is late I'm super sorry for the wait, I hope it's worth it. It physically PAINED ME- i couldn't write for like three days straight XD but on the bright side!!! I APPLIED FOR COLLEGE! So yeeeeet! That was crazy and stressful but its done and then I was like CHAPTER 14 LETS GO. It's almost 11 and I have had a lot of coffee and I'm about to keep writing >:)

I hope you all had a great week, thank you guys for all of your comments and support, it means the world and it definitely keeps me going so thank you all very very much <3 I hope you all are enjoying summer!

ANYWAY this chapter muahahahah a good chunk of a lot happens, so i rly hope you enjoy! We get some super awesome parallels and more confessions and some tension and angst because u know me, anddddd oh yeah father son moments because I know you guys have been waiting for those :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I've missed these," Peter said in delight, his eyes shut as he bit down into his second cheeseburger. After a week and a half- well...more like three months, of crappy food, a hot burger with pickles and ketchup was just what he needed. They got gotten food and were now back in the med bay. Well...they hadn't exactly gotten it; Peter had insisted on calling one of their friends on the staff so that Tony, who was trying to cover up the fact that he got stabbed in his leg, wouldn't have to walk. Chuck, relived to see Peter back, gladly got them six cheeseburgers and Tony gave him a bonus.

Tony grinned as he finished off his first, "They missed you too. No one's been eating them."

Peter swallowed and made a face as he wiped the side of his mouth with a napkin, "Uh, you have," he snorted, shaking his head and holding up his cheeseburger. "You can't resist these, we used to eat them every Friday after school!"

Tony faltered and suddenly looked down at the table, "Yeah. I know."

Peter's gaze slackened and his smile fell as he blinked, his brow furrowing, "You stopped coming, didn't you?"

Tony nodded, "Yeah. This is the first I've had one since..." the man attempts humor, "since I made my oopsie."

"Made y-" Peter stutters, "Made your oopsie, what are you five? Is that the pain pills talking, are you getting loopy?" he demands with a grin, rolling his eyes.

"Don't know. You probably wouldn't be able to tell," Tony admits before he sobers his tone and looks down at the table. "But yeah, I- haven't...since."

Successfully getting them back on track, Peter was slightly shocked. He was starting to realize what big an impact the whole argument had had on Tony as well. But after their talk, Peter hated silence even more so he crumpled up the wrapper and chucked it at Tony's face with a lopsided grin as he started his second, "Well I'm back. So every Friday again."

Tony smiled, tossing his finished wrapper in Peter's direction, "Deal."

They both went back to munching away, enjoying the delicious food in blissful silence, and not a lot of pain for once. Until an angry yell made them both jump.

"What the hell? Did you walk to get food?" Rhodey demanded, sticking his head in the med bay and seeing them at the table as he passed by.

Tony nodded crumpling one of the wrappers that had unfolded by his side, "Yeah, I raced Peter up a flight of stairs and then we ran the length of the compound." The look on Rhodey's face was priceless.

Peter snickered and shook his head, "Don't worry Rhodes, we had Chuck get it for us. I'm not letting him rip his stitches."

"Good...well I'm glad you got it," Rhodey gave Tony a look and waved to Peter before slipping out.

"Do you *want* to get in trouble?" Peter asked with a snort, grabbing his fourth cheeseburger and leaning back in his chair.

Tony shrugged with a knowing smirk, "Well I didn't exactly have a partner in crime for three months so I'm easing back into it."

"Or someone to keep you in check. Sometimes I'm the more mature one," Peter smiled. Tony nodded in agreement.

Peter finished off his cheeseburger in happy silence before they both sat there. For the first time it didn't feel completely awkward. Finally, Tony motioned forward, unable to look at the kid who was covered in cuts and bruises without knowing if he was okay. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm..." Peter trailed off and made a face. He sighed and admitted, "I've been better." Tony made a chuckling sound of agreement and the kid smirks. Peter shifts in his seat and then meets Tony's eyes. He looks nervous and his voice comes out small. "I'll bet you money the team wants to talk to us about what happened."

Tony nodded slowly, trying to ignore the clenching in his chest, "So what do you want to say?"

Peter blinked uncomfortably and says, "I- I don't know exactly. I mean, obviously I don't want to relive it, but they deserve to know what happened. They got us out of there, they want to know what they were up against. With...Damian and...all of that."

The kid flinched while saying his name and Tony didn't miss it. His blood boiled and he was glad the man was dead, or he would have gone back there and killed him himself. Then Tony addressed the verbal issue. "Kid, if you don't want to tell them anything, you don't have to," he assured him. "None of them will force you, I promise."

Peter ran a hand through his messy hair, "I know." His voice was sincere, as if that wasn't his problem. Tony realized he wanted to tell him, but didn't know how- or even more accurately, couldn't. Tony didn't blame him. The man who had tortured him for a week and a half had been the same man who killed his aunt. Peter suddenly looked up, cocking his head with such hope as he hesitantly asked, "Are you gonna tell them?"

Tony contemplated that and bit his lip, "I may leave out some details but yeah. The jist of it."

"Okay," Peter nodded, a weight lifting off his shoulders that he pleaded for Tony to help him carry. His voice was small as he said a statement in the form of a question, testing out their communication skills they were just starting to remaster. "Then I'll just let you tell them."

Tony looked over at him and saw a scared and nervous 16 year old, a kid who didn't know how to talk to his family, a kid who needed to be protected. And he would do anything to protect him. Tony gave him a nod and a look of assurance, "Okay. No problem, kid." The relief on Peter's face, even if the kid tried to hide it, was blatant. His shoulders fell back and his worry lines dissappeared. Tony felt everything was said and done and he pushed his chair back to clean up the table, hiding a wince at the pain in his chest.

"We should talk about it though," Peter blurted out, his eyes darting to connect with Tony's.

Tony frowned and started to gather the trash in his hand, blinking spots away from standing up to fast. Dealing with injuries had never been his thing, and right now he wasn't putting any pressure on his bad leg, just having it hover slightly above the floor so it looked like he would stand fine. If he had been alone in the room, maybe he would have crumpled over in pain, but Tony's strength came from his family, and the closest thing he had to a son was sitting in front of him, and Tony didn't want the kid to see him in any more pain than he already had. The look on Peter's face was troubling enough, like he had just caught the kid stealing from the cookie jar, but it was a cookie he didn't like. Peter's hesitance meant he needed to get something off his chest, but he was unsure if he should bring it up even though it clearly had importance. So Tony softened his tone and gave Peter a comforting but questioning tone to ask him to elaborate, "What do you mean?"

"Tony, you took waterboarding for me," Peter said, clasping his arm to stop him from walking across the room. He didn't need to stop him from going anywhere, because Tony froze.

Woah.

Okay.

Tony looked over at him, shocked. Too shocked to realize that the only reason he hadn't lapsed into flashbacks was because that boy's hand was on his arm, grounding him, tying him to reality, a silent assurance of support.

Out of all the things they had been through, that was what scarred Peter the most? That's what he wanted to talk about? Tony had taken a lot of hits for the kid these past couple days, so much so that they all blurred together. He wasn't phased by it; he'd do anything for Peter, but this looked like it seriously bothered the boy. It was on the first day, when things hadn't even started to get as bad as they did.

Peter seemed to now register he still had hold of Tony's sleeve and his cheeks flushed in childlike embarrassment as he let it go, but his eyes trained on him, pleading, asking him not to walk away like he didn't know if he had the courage to say what he had just said again. Tony silently assured him he wasn't going anywhere as he brushed Peter's outstretched arm and returned to his seat and withholding a wince, sinking into the chair with a furrowed brow.

What to say?

Tony blinked and decided to be truthful as he admitted, "Out of all the things-"

"Yes," Peter interrupted before Tony could even finish his sentence. Why? Because the kid knew exactly what he was getting at. His expression was dead serious.

"Oh," Tony said. Silence. Until he coked his head and asked, "Why?"

Peter looked down and mumbled, "It was meant for me."

"So?" Tony scoffed without thinking because that's all it was. It was a knee jerk response, just like how jumping in front of the bullet had been.

The kid legitimately chuckled and repeated him quietly, "So?" He shook his head. "Tony, you had just shown up after 3 months. And at that point I still had no idea if you-" Peter faltered, making a face like he didn't know how to put it. "You had just been stabbed in a broken shoulder for me. And I guess...I don't know, I just thought that was as far as you would go. I know you, and I know what happened in Afghanistan..." the boy trailed off as he saw Tony's jaw clench.

Tony curled his hand into a fist and sucked in a breath, his lungs tightening, his heartbeat speeding up. Sad that that was all it took. But there was Peter again, the one saving him from drowning, pulling him out of the deep.

"Tony, stick with me," the kid demanded. "This is exactly my point. I know how you feel about it because I know what they did to you. And I know you hate the water," he says quietly, his voice just as broken as Tony felt. He tried to gulp down the feeling of water dripping down his throat, and fill his lungs which had started burning with muscle memory. He was unable to breath for a second.

"But you still managed to get yourself into that torture and me out of it," Peter shakes his head, looking down and admitting quietly, "I was scared. Heck, I was...terrified."

Tony can breathe again. Because his head snaps to Peter, wide alert. Peter was staring at him and Tony realized the boy had intentionally just said what he had in the order that he did to prove another point. No matter what was wrong, Peter in pain or hurt or scared or even worried always came first. That was both his weakness and his greatest strength and the minute he heard the kid's voice, his troubles flew out the window and he shoved everything down. Because something was more important.

Upon him realizing this, Peter nodded in recognition as he continued softly, "And he didn't even get to touch me, because you stepped in. Even tied up and stabbed in the shoulder you somehow stepped in and put yourself in front of me and shielded me, like you always do. But this wasn't like all the other times. This wasn't just physical pain, I know it wasn't." Peter stops and then lowers his voice even more, nearly whispering, "I know why you're awake at 3 am in the lab."

Crap.

Memories flood back into his head as Tony's eyes widen and he looks up at the kid who looks so timid, like he doesn't know if Tony's going to be mad with him. On his lips Tony is asking why, how, when....*no*. That was never something he wanted to burden Peter with. This week had been enough, these three months had been enough, ruining something from before when everything was....right, seemed like a horrible violation. But it had happened. Peter would stay the night and they would say goodnight at around midnight, leaving for their separate rooms but every time Tony would turn around and walk down to the lab because he knew what was waiting for him if he closed his eyes. Tony got a chill and he shivered despite his efforts not to. Sensing his discomfort, Peter jumps on his opportunity.

"You're proving my point- you're thinking it's a bad thing that I know, but it's not. It's a bad thing you never told me. Of course I know you didn't just feel like getting up, you have nightmares. I've always known," he says gently.

Tony looks at him with guilt but Peter brushes it off. How many times had the kid woken up and was shocked to find Tony in the lab, the man grinning and acting like he had just woken up early to get some work done when in reality his head had never touched the pillow? And even more troubling, how many times had Peter woken up on purpose to keep him company once he figured out what was going on, pretending that he just couldn't go back to sleep because in reality, the kid knew all along that Tony was lying?

"We need to talk more, okay?" Peter says softly, his voice firm but somehow gentle all the same. It's sincere too, like he's willing to fix more than they already had. "We hid a lot from each other and that's when things went south. So no more secrets, okay?" Peter says, gulping as he looks at Tony for approval.

"Deal," Tony says quietly after finding his voice. It still comes out as a croak.

Peter nods and gives him a small smile. There's a period of meaningful silence before the kid murmurs, "You went through the one thing you feared the most just for me, Tony. And when you looked at me and I was trying to get you to back out of it and let me take it...that was the first time I knew that you didn't stop caring about me. I don't know why I ever doubted you."

"Maybe because I walked out," Tony grumbled with a hint of guilt and a small smirk.

Peter snickered and shook his head, "That was so three months ago." Tony bent his head, smiling and Peter nodded, "You never stopped caring about me. I should have known that."

Tony was silent. He had no answer to that, because an answer would mean he was accepting the apology Peter was making. Well, he didn't think the kid needed to apologize. Peter scratched his arm and cleared his throat, trying to get them back on track. He mumbled, "Out of everything you went through because of me..." he shook his head, "That- well that was probably the worst. And it's been eating at me this entire time. So I just...wanted to say...thanks."

Tony didn't know what to say. The kid was right. Yes, that had been close to the scariest thing he had ever done, giving in to the one thing that scared him. Two things that scared him. Tony had regretted walking out for the past three months, but when he took that waterboarding, he proved that he would do anything for the kid, which was the reason why he had them split up in the first place. He was fearful that Peter would do the same for him.

Trying to straighten his thoughts, he took a shaky breath and ran a hand over his face before nodding. He still was floored by the idea that this was the main thing eating away at the kid, after everything they had been through- even him taking a bullet for him. But like he said, but still could not register, Peter was right. Waterboarding had been worse, but Tony would never admit it out loud. Nor that he knew he wouldn't sleep for another couple of months because the flashbacks and nightmares would be at least one hundred times worse. But he wouldn't mention that to the kid in hopes he could maybe fool him- well he couldn't the first time so there was really no way he could now. He was just shocked that Peter understood the importance and impact that Tony had hid from him. This whole time, Peter had known.

"Kid, I-" Tony trailed off into uncertainty. *Say it.* "I'd do anything for you."

Peter smiled lightly, looking down. Then he joked, "Careful, I might walk out."

Tony gave him a pointed look, but the teasing tone that he had missed made him smirk and scoff out, "That's not funny."

"It's a little funny," Peter corrected.

Tony rolled his eyes. Suddenly the door burst open and Steve came in, breathing hard. Tony and Peter both looked up, jumping. Tony frowned and raised his hand in question, "Why the hell is everyone barging in? I swear, every 20 minutes, it's like you guys time it. Where's the fire?"

"Coming," Steve snarled angrily. "Ross is here. And he's coming for you."

"What do you mean he's 'coming for me'?" Tony demanded, his lip curling with amusement.

Steve rolled his eyes as Clint, Rhodey and Nat came in as well. "He wants to know why he wasn't notified of your capture and why we authorized the resources we did to get you out and do the search of the base."

"You're kidding right?" Tony marveled, looking to the other Avengers to confirm the stupidity he had just heard, which they did, with their looks. "He wants to know why you guys saved me?" he laughed in shock.

"If you want to look at it like that, sure, but he'll word it some way where it's pinned on us and makes him look like a good person," Natasha sighed, shaking her head. "You know Ross, he's always looking for a reason to screw us over."

Clint makes a face of disgust, "He claims we can't just use valuable resources at short notice and wants to revoke our privileges so that we can't," he does exaggerated air quotes in distaste, "take a SHIELD force for a milk run when they could be needed elsewhere."

"Milk run?" Peter demanded loudly.

Tony cursed at the same time which made them talk in sync, "Milk run?" They both looked at each other, their gazes flicking to the side. Tony rubbed a hand over his face and muttered, "You've got to be kidding me. God, I wish I could fire him."

"You can't just fire everybody," Rhodey said in exasperation. "By the way you're gonna get a call from the Social Worker Director. They want to know why you fired that dude from the hospital that you threatened."

Peter looks over at him in shock. "Kerry?" he spluttered with wide eyes and a forming grin. "You fired Kerry?"

Tony raises an eyebrow and shrugs slowly, "I...may have pulled some strings."

"You're kidding?" Peter exclaimed.

Tony turned to him and asked, "Maybe, maybe not. Would you have a problem if I did fire him?"

Peter beams and admits, "Absolutely not."

"Good, because I did." Tony smiles, winking at Peter. His chest grew warm as he turned his attention back to the team. Looking at Cap, Tony's brow suddenly furrows as he squints. He had thought Steve was just in the shadow of the door but whatever was under his eye was no shadow. He suddenly remembered Pepper announcing what had happened to Steve: black eye. Tony put on a calm expression and asked innocently, "Steve, what happened?"

Steve's face slackened and the other Avengers snickered, turning away and covering their smiles with a hand. Steve shifts his footing and grumbles, "Pepper."

Peter grins, "Care to elaborate?"

Steve shoots him a look and makes a face, "No. Not really."

"We can always ask Pepper for the scoop," Tony suggests.

"I went and found her after we got you settled and she seemed to figure it out once I started talking about it," Steve said weakly. "And then she started yelling at me, which I deserved. And then, you know, she told FRIDAY to take my wife out and all that stuff and I thought I was done, but then she called me back and," he frowns. "She had her hands on her hips and then I walked over and she just-" Steve mimicked a swing.

"She punched you," Tony finishes with amusement.

"I *let* her punch me," Steve quickly corrects, but it seemed like he was grasping for his dignity.

Natasha snorts, "No you didn't. You didn't see that fist coming at all, don't lie."

"Yeah," Steve muttered.

"Did you fall?" Peter asked, cocking his head in genuine confusion.

"Pete," Tony snickers.

Peter shrugs, "Just asking."

Tony grins and shrugs, "You should have told her. I hear you got no wife and no Netflix?"

"And dish duty," Rhodey reminds Cap, clapping his shoulder. Steve shoves him off with a glare and Rhodey spins away laughing.

"Was it right handed or left handed swing?" Peter asked.

"Peter!" Tony laughs again.

"Just asking!" Peter puts up his hand in surrender.

Steve snapped, blurting out, "She punched me, left handed, straight in the face, and I fell over. And now I have a black eye and know not to lie to Pepper any more. There. There was the story. All you all happy now?"

"Pepper's right handed," Tony laughs, cutting his smile when he sees Steve's face, but the damage was done and everyone is laughing. "Sorry. It's not funny at all. Not even a little."

"It's frickin hilarious," Peter whispers, breaking Tony's poker face.

Cap waves his hands, exclaiming in embarrassment, his cheeks a dark red, "This is not what we need to be discussing right now. Although Tony, I will pay you money if you can get me my wife back. Please."

"I'm already rich, sorry, I don't need twenty dollars," Tony snickers. There was also no way he was going against an angry Pepper. "I told you, you were screwed."

"Guys, he's coming," Natasha warns, her hand falling from her ear. "I just got an update from Wanda. He's headed for the med bay."

"Better warm up our sarcasm," Tony tells Peter. "I haven't seen Thunderbolt in a while."

"And I'm sure he's thrilled to see you," Peter rolls his eyes.

Tony looks around and attempts to rub his hands before remembering one of them is in a cast, "Fifty bucks he brings me a gift basket and a nice get well soon card." Everyone chuckles and then the door opens. God, the man doesn't even knock. Tony looks past Steve who turns around, his smile instantly falling. Tony fakes enthusiasm and shouts, "Ross! We were just talking about you!"

"I'm sure you were," the man says with narrowed eyes. He's in a tailored suit, with his grey hair flawlessly combed back and stiff. His eyes are cold as usual, and his hand is clenched around his briefcase. Tony searches his arms but sees no gift basket. The man sets the case down and clasps his hands in front of him, nodding to the other Avengers before turning his gaze on Tony, "We need to talk."

Tony smiles fakely, "Oh, I'm great, thanks for asking. Bullet wound, stab wound, broken ribs and a couple other minor things, but other than that, peachy. How are you?"

Ross sighs, completely ignoring him, "The humor gets old, Stark."

"So do you," Tony snorts, looking him up and down. "In case you weren't aware- oh that's right, you weren't- I took a little vacation on the past couple days?" Tony asked, furrowing his brow and moving his hands to exaggerate his point. "And I just got back. So I'd prefer not to listen to you for a whole while because I fear that will worsen my condition."

"Then sign this and I will be on my way," Ross snaps back, opening the case and sliding out a stapled piece of paper. "It's a document revoking the Avengers' rights to SHIELD resources."

He holds it out for Tony who winces and shakes his head, "Ah, but see, one? I don't like being handed things. And two, tempting, but no. I have just the place for it though, where it will be safely filed. That grey bin in the corner."

Ross turns and sees the trash can. his gaze darkening as his jaw clenches. He retracts his hand in distaste and utter hate and narrows his eyes, before his gaze suddenly flicks to Peter, who the man had just realized was standing next to Tony. He straightens and looks down on the kid, muttering, "What are you doing here?"

"Staring at an idiot," Peter shrugs. "Nice to see you too, Ross."

The man blinks, and for a second his gaze turns to Tony like he's seeing double. He focuses on Peter and scrunches up his nose. "You need to leave," he sniffs, fixing his tie.

"Oh, I'm great, thanks for asking. Broken arm, third degree burns, sprained ankle, broken ribs and a couple other minor things, but other than that, peachy. How are you?" Peter said without stuttering. He doesn't move an inch in the direction of the door.

Ross looked like he was about to blow his top. He blinks once, like he was in shock Peter had even dared speak to him that way, before a frown settled on the man's face. Tony couldn't be prouder. Ross takes a breath and turns his attention to Tony, as if since he couldn't get to Peter, he can reach him through Tony, "The child needs to leave."

"I'll escort you out then," Tony says firmly, staring Ross dead in the eye. He almost snorts at the fact that Ross thinks he would kick the kid out. Judging from the man's expression to that, he realizes he did expect him to. Tony wiggles his brows just to piss him off and Ross' eyes widen with more anger, making Tony smirk- which only instigates him further. If looks could kill, at least three people would be dead. The tension captures the whole room to the point where one could feel

it rippling off each person caught in a stand off.

Cap breaks it, sensing Tony's discomfort and tries to appear diplomatic, but Tony gives him credit since it's not as nice as Steve usually speaks to the man. "Look, Ross. We're not signing that thing. We needed the resources and they were properly used. There were no casualties and it was actually a big win for you guys."

"It was a milk run," Ross hissed.

"A milk run?" Peter demanded. "Me getting kidnapped, I get. But these people kidnapped Tony Stark and got away with it for longer than they should have been able to. You're just sad they didn't finish the job because you know Tony is the only one who keeps you in check." Tony's head snaps in his direction, surprised at his boldness, but Peter isn't even done. He sneers, "Sorry to disappoint, you pathetic-

"What the kid is trying to say," Natasha cuts him off, giving Peter a nod of assurance with a look that says *that's exactly what he deserves but it's better if I say it*, "is that we needed those troops." Ross tears his hateful gaze away from Peter as Natasha continues, "As the people who you call when the world needs saving, we are entitled to that. Tony and Peter were kidnapped. While maybe you would leave your family behind, we won't. God forbid we took a squad in to do our job. I personally don't see anything wrong with that." Natasha crosses her arms and waits for Ross to answer, but Rhodey is next to back her up before he can create a retort.

"Sir, they had weapons that we didn't even know were on the black market, with tech that we couldn't crack almost until it was too late. Now if you're saying we should have let Tony Stark and a 16 year old rot in the hands of a psychopath, then I will quote you on that," Rhodey said fiercely, his gaze flashing. Tony gives him a smile.

"That's not what I'm saying," Ross said slowly.

"He considered it," Peter announced, and Ross shot him a look of absolute fury.

"I would never even think of such a thing," the man said through gritted teeth, obviously only for the record; his gaze was scorching.

"I know a blue fairy that can make you a real boy, Ross. It's nothing to be ashamed of." Not only was he calling the man a liar, but a puppet too. Peter snickers next to him and Ross looks ready to smack him but Tony's not done with him yet, "You do whatever the government tells you. And they don't like me very much because I have a mind of my own and have a flying suit that shoots lasers." Tony steels his gaze and sobers his tone, meaning business as he swears, "But I am not a threat, and this team and I are the only reason this world is still alive, so I expect you to allow them to do whatever they have to if one of us, or two of us, go down."

"There are still people out there who were involved in this. And let me remind you that the Raft breakout was under your name, so half of this was your fault. Once again, we're cleaning your mess. Unofficially, of course," Clint says, raising both eyebrows.

Ross is fuming by now and shakes his head, not even addressing Clint's claim, "The Avengers are getting out of control-"

"Why?" Steve demands with a snort. "Because Tony got kidnapped along with a kid and we went in and got him back from people that were a threat to the same branch government that won't even back our actions?"

"No, remember he doesn't speak for the government," Tony says, pointing a finger at him. "He just sits behind a desk and makes decisions that make tiny explosions that the people above him overlook. Talk about corrupted by power. You may like to think you run the Avengers, but you don't. We will continue to use our resources, and I for one am internally devastated that you didn't give me at least chocolate covered fruits. You know the ones that they put in little bouquets- I think they're called edibles-"

Ross steps forward and Peter tenses next to him but Tony squeezes his arm behind him, staring Ross dead in the eye as the man gets in his face. "Is this a joke to you?" he snarls, trying to intimidate the man since he stands a few inches taller. Tony isn't easily intimidated.

"No," Tony says, raising his chin and stepping up the man, well aware of Peter's gaze right behind him. "But apparently it's a joke to you. If word got out that you came demanding the Avengers give up their ability to ask for help, how good would that look? The one time we ask for a little support after everything that we've done, and you deny it? Yeah, the press will have a field day. Or that you came bursting into my compound unannounced to yell at me when I just got back from going through hell that you can't even imagine for the past two days?"

Ross scoffed. He *scoffed*. If it was tense before, it just rose by a hundred. Tony felt Peter tense behind him without even looking. The kid was about to yell, so Tony immediately shot back, his fists curling. He got in the man's face and snarled, "You wouldn't last two minutes with what I've been through, but you're pretending you have the balls to actually think you can force me to sign a paper that punishes the people that saved my life. You really did get dropped as a kid," he said firmly, not breaking eye contact as he sank back onto his heels, his gaze burning. Peter was breathing hard, his glare fixed on Ross beside him.

The man's lip curls and he spits, "You are unbelievably narcissistic."

"Yep," Tony nods with a fake smile. He pointed to himself and made a face, "Also the guy who pulls you from the fire every couple months. Along with my team. Who you're trying to punish for doing their job."

Ross doesn't answer and they stand face to face with glares that could kill. Peter is standing very tense next to Tony, his gaze flicking back and forth between the two men. Tony suddenly can't look at him anymore. Disgust takes over that the man could scoff about what he had been through, what Peter had been through, what Damian had done to the kid. Tony could care less if he was insulted, he would take it and internalize it like he always did and retort with sarcasm. But when someone insulted Peter, that was not only the last straw, but the death wish. Any last strand of patience Tony had was suddenly snapped as he analyzed what Ross was actually scoffing- what he was playing down as if it was no big deal. Peter on the ground screaming as a lunatic jabbed a cattle prod into his side, and the man scoffs.

Ross say the building fury and tried not to look surprised but he did flinch against his will when Tony met his gaze again. There was obviously something different. Tony grits his teeth and hisses quietly, "Get out."

"You can't make me," Ross says with some weak sarcasm, but he takes a step back and straightens his suit, clearly jarred by Tony's simple command.

"Are you eight years old?" Tony demands, his eyes widening at Ross' boldness. He considers calling a suit and doing the same thing he did to Kerry. He then cocks his head and admits, "And yes, I could."

"Ross, we're not signing it," Natasha says with a fake smile, interrupting the two men before one of

them could actually get violent. "So if that's all you came here for, you can leave."

"This isn't over," Ross says firmly, looking at the people in the room who expressed nothing but distaste for him.

"Yes, it is," Steve nods, not even giving him a second after he finished his sentence. "We're tired of you trying to pull the rug out from under us."

"Then maybe you should stop giving me opportunities to," Ross snarls.

"You just admitted you have it out for us," Clint exclaimed, looking around as if asking a fake audience if they heard that.

"*Unofficially*," Ross smiles at him, his eyes flashing with anger as he makes a face.

"That makes it okay," Peter announces sarcastically, earning a snort from Clint and a snicker from Nat. Steve and Rhodey tried to remain professional.

"And *you*," Ross snarls to Peter in a venomous tone that makes Peter smirk. Tony's gaze instantly snaps up and he shifts over closer to Peter, giving Ross a warning look. He may have a bullet wound, a broken arm, and a stab in his thigh, but Peter knows Tony won't let that stop him. Ross makes a face at Peter and changes his voice like he's talking to a younger kid, "You think just because you and Tony are so close that you can talk to me, a government official, like a kid on the playground?"

"I don't know what kindergarten you go to, because I go to a high school," Peter admits slowly before nodding, "But yeah. I do think that."

"This is your bad influence," Ross points at Tony, seething in anger.

Tony grins and claps Peter on his good shoulder before ruffling his hair. He smiles up at Ross and winks, "Guilty. No regrets, either."

"You have no respect," Ross hisses, his hands curling to fists, his eyes flashing.

"For douche bags like you? No," Tony admits coldly.

"You're pathetic," Ross spat with disgust.

Peter raised his hand and steps forward, the look on his face surprising the heck out of Tony, "I'm sorry, I've heard enough and just can't take it anymore. Who the hell do you think you are?"

Ross scoffs and looks around at the Avengers who give him no support. He laughs nervously and looks back at Peter, snickering, "Excuse me?"

Peter pushes past Tony's arm which instantly goes out to stop him. Tony lets him pass and the kid gets closer to Ross, narrowing his eyes as he swears, "You *don't* get to talk to him like that."

A smile spread onto Ross' face and he clasped his hands, looking at Tony, "You've got a teenager fighting your battles for you now?"

Tony's expression faltered but Peter didn't miss a beat, snapping to get Ross' attention, which makes the General's eyes flash red, "No. He's trying to be polite for once. I on the other hand, couldn't give a crap about pissing you off," Peter said sweetly. "So I will put in the effort to make you look like an idiot. Although it won't be that hard. Just keep talking."

"This is great," Ross shrugged, pointing at Peter while looking at Tony. "You're proud of him, aren't you?"

"Very much so, yes," Tony admitted with a smirk, his gaze on Peter who's glare stays firm on his face.

"I will ruin you," Ross warned, pointing at Tony with fury. Always Tony. It didn't matter how many people pissed him off, the blame would always fall on Tony's shoulders. And this time there was a lot of it...more than usual. The man was seriously mad, and the Avengers shifted uncomfortably, the air in the room getting dangerously thin and slightly concerning.

Tony took it with a cocky smile but there was a bit in his words, "Easy there cowboy, don't bring out the big guns just yet. Although I'd like to see you try," he admitted darkly.

Ross was done. He was downright furious. Tony had pissed the man off for the past however many years, he was practically a professional. Which meant he knew well enough that Ross would never take the next step as to getting physical. So when Ross surged forward in anger, it was probably just to get in Tony's face or tower over him since he was taller. But the kid next to him, who had been with him while he was brutally tortured for the last couple days took it as a threat, and Peter's protectiveness shone through any common sense that there was no way in hell that General Ross would ever punch Tony Stark. But wait, Ross was raising his fist, a curled one, and Tony stayed still. The boy to his left didn't. Peter saw someone angry, with a curled fist, moving forward threateningly towards the one person he cared about, who he had watched get tortured in front of him while he was tied to a chair, helpless.

Well now he wasn't. And he had had enough.

So, out of pure instinct and without even thinking, he sidestepped in front and thrust his fist forward, his knuckles connecting with the man's face.

General frickin Ross lets out a yelp as Peter clocks him one. He stumbles back, clutching his bloody nose before falling to the ground hard on his tailbone, blood pouring over his knuckles. There are a few shouts when the fist makes contact and everyone jumps, their hands going to their mouths in shock. But then there's complete silence. Terrifying delicious silence full of some smirks, dropped jaws, raised eyebrows- looks that dwindle on the verge of horrified and amused.

Realizing he had just punched the General in the face, Peter holds back a kick, knowing that would go to well. He isn't even shocked or confused or surprised- like everyone else in the room. He's serious, confident, and pissed, breathing hard, his eyes still flashing. Peter knew what he was doing. He punched the man straight in the face because he deserved it and because he had been protecting Tony. He wasn't going to apologize now or appear weak. So his glare did not even waver as he towered over the general on the floor, somehow looking intimidating even though he was a sixteen with a broken arm. The look in his eyes was enough. And there was pure fear in the gaze he was staring into because of it.

Tony curses loudly behind him, calling out his nickname and it barely reaches Peter's ears. But reach it it does, and it's the only thing able to pull him out whatever came over him. A hand folds around his good arm and Peter allows Tony to pull him back just slightly as time starts to pass again at normal speed. "Pete, Peter, hey," Tony stutters until Peter meets his eyes. The man's gaze is shocked and he chokes out, "Kid you just-"

Hit Ross in the face?

Did something ridiculous and stupid?

Protected me?

"Yeah, I did," Peter said firmly, saying yes to all of those immediately and thinking nothing of it. Ross makes attempts to get up, still wiping his nose and Peter's eyes narrow. He immediately shakes Tony off gently and steps in front of him, still inclined to protect him from the man who looks just as mad as he had before, now that Peter has backed up. There's space between them, so Ross thinks the balance will be tipped toward him.

Ross gets up staggering and turns his hateful gaze on Peter the minute he gains his footing. He wipes his bloody nose and his head snaps up, eyes fierce. Peter stands his ground even as a finger is thrust forward and Ross snarls, "*You*. You think you can throw a punch at me and get away with it?"

"Yeah," Peter dares him without hesitation, feeling Tony's hand curl around his sleeve. It only solidifies his decision and he smiles fakely- daringly almost. "Yeah, I do. And I dare you to hit me back."

Ross doesn't need to be told twice and he curls his fist, about to start forward out of anger, obviously not thinking about Peter's age or what he was gonna do. Steve, Rhodey, Nat, and Clint all tense, but they're not the ones who move. Peter feels a hand clench the back of his shirt and he's suddenly yanked backward, the man behind him cutting in front and physically blocking the approaching General's path. Tony barks out, "Ross, you touch him and I will *ruin* you. I'm not kidding."

Tony said those sentences in less than two seconds, the second one as Ross tries to stop dead in his tracks and nearly runs into Tony who doesn't budge even an inch. The General backs up to get a good stance and plans to sneer in the man's face. But the look Tony is sporting is identical to the one from Peter that made Ross cower not a minute ago. The man gulps, glancing between the two gazes trained on him. He shrinks back but then stutters in protest, waving his hand angrily, "No. No, you can't do that. Move, Tony."

"Not gonna happen," Tony shakes his head.

Peter smiles innocently and comes to Tony's side, still staying behind his arm; he knew Tony wouldn't want him in front. He had his turn, now he had to help out Tony and end this. "You would hit a minor?" he asks timidly, the glint in his eyes showing he's kidding.

Ross lowers his fist but still takes a dangerous step forward- only an inch due to Tony's body language at that movement. He stops there and finds Peter's gaze, hissing, "You made the first move. You instigated. I will let the board know, Tony. Mark my words."

Natasha frowns, "Unfortunately the cameras in here are undergoing maintenance."

"And even if they weren't," Clint pipes up, shrugging, "it's really hard to get some of the footage off. Sometimes it just deletes?" He makes a face. "It's weird."

"You are admitting you all are going to cover for him when he clearly just assaulted me," Ross hissed in fury.

"Unofficially," Steve smiles.

"That makes it okay," Rhodey adds, crossing his arms.

Ross is fuming and he points at Peter, "A pathetic sophomore kid over-"

"You watch your mouth," Tony swears angrily and Peter curls his hand in Tony's shirt to hold him back. Tony doesn't fight him and he stays but he points at him, "And yes. Anyone over you, especially Peter. New flash, Ross, no one likes you. Deal with it."

"I will take you to court young man," Ross swears.

Peter widens his eyes in fake surprise, "A 16 year old kid with a broken arm punched you in the face? Yeah, that will hold up in court. And if you insist on it, I can plead self defense. You stormed toward me, that's a threatening advance and I was just tortured for a week and a half. I'm severely traumatized," Peter nodded with his lower lip stuck out. Tony knew Peter wasn't kidding; this past week and a half had really scarred the kid for life, but here was just an example of how alike he was to Tony. Using humor as a coping mechanism to further his argument and defend himself. Tony would be beyond proud if that wasn't something he never wanted to teach him. Peter scoffed and shrugged, looking at him in pity, "I mean, say goodbye to your job, I guess."

Tony, who has calmed down now due to Peter's adjusted attitude, joins in. He gives Ross a cocky smile, squeezing Peter's good shoulder and smirking, "What he said."

Ross' gaze was literally on fire he was so mad, but he backed up slowly after a second of debate. Peter nodded, approving of his retreat. There is complete silence. Ross looks around and sees no help from the Avengers so he shoves the paper back into the briefcase, wipes his nose on his sleeve, slams his case shut, glaring at everyone one last time before heading for the door. He makes it about halfway.

"Ross!" Peter calls and the man stops. He doesn't turn around, and Peter doesn't care. "If you think you're having the last word by not turning around, you're wrong. I just need you to hear me. So listen up," Peter snarls. "If you ever talk to Tony like you just did *ever* again?" Peter pauses. Ross is clearly waiting. "I will kick you off the Empire State Building," Peter says angrily, and he sounds deadly serious. Ross sure believes him; his shoulders tense. Then if that wasn't enough, Peter adds, "Do you understand me?" through gritted teeth and a curled fist itching to walk right up and swing again. He raises an eyebrow, waiting for a response.

Ross doesn't answer, instead he walks to the door, opens it without saying a word, and slips out, slamming it behind him.

"Well that was the best thing I've seen all year," Steve announces once the footsteps fade down the hall. He breaks the silence and everyone starts laughing, staring at Peter.

Tony blinks at the teen who turns around like nothing happened. Tony snorts, "A lot of people are getting punched today. Mostly by you." He reaches and ruffles Peter's hair and the kid smiles.

Natasha clasps his hands, "Well that was something. I'm sorry the rest of the team missed it."

"We can watch it on the security cameras," Clint grinned happily, bouncing on his heels. "They're not under maintenance and they transfer footage perfectly."

Tony laughs and looks around, "Well does anyone else plan on bursting through the door today?"

Rhodey smirks, "No, I think we're all you've got. I like how we're just accepting the fact that Peter punched him. I think we'll just leave now and go spread the good news. You guys okay?"

"Yeah," Tony nods after looking at Peter who comes to the same answer. There are genuine smiles on everyone's faces, and they all start to snicker.

"How'd it feel?" Clint asks. "Did you hit him really hard? Sorry, you're just living my dream in

front of me, I'm slightly jealous."

"His nose was bleeding, so I'd say Peter got him good," Tony said, rubbing the kid's shoulder.

"Okay, well let us know if you need anything," Natasha says as the Avengers all start for the door, giving Peter winks and waves before they file out. "Peter that was fantastic," she tells him with a grin.

"Thanks Nat," Peter laughs, slightly embarrassed.

The door closes and Tony chuckles, "I can't believe you punched Ross in the face."

Peter snorts as they go back to the table and sink down into their chairs, "Someone had to."

"Yeah, but I always thought it would be me," Tony said thoughtfully. "I piss him off more. It should have been me."

Peter blinks, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'll let him clock you next time so that you can get a revenge swing in and claim your title."

"Thanks," Tony grins, and Peter rolls his eyes. "And thanks," Tony adds, in a different tone. Peter glances up and gives him a small smile, and they leave it at that. Tony isn't going to talk about the fact that Peter had stepped in front and swung to protect him, because the kid already knew why he did it. Bringing it up again would just be reiterating something they both knew. Nor was he going to address how much it had meant to him, and how-

"New email Tony," FRIDAY interrupts.

Tony sighs and grabs the nearest device which happens to be an iPad on the bedside table. He scrolls, his eyes narrowing as he reads the email sent to him, his smile immediately falling. Peter starts tossing used wrappers into the trash, so far making every single one and he looks over, casually asking, "What is it?"

"They retrieved the will. They'll have it here at our request," Tony said quietly, carefully watching Peter's expression, not wanting to upset him.

Peter misses the last wrapper and puts his hand on the back of his neck, leaning against the table with his elbow. "Okay. And what's the deal with that?" Tony looks at him, unsure to answer and Peter glances over, shaking his head, "We were supposed to have this conversation after cheeseburgers. We finished cheeseburgers. I punched Ross as a bonus, and now we need to keep talking." He said it with such authority, like Tony was going to argue with him. "So we're having the conversation," he says firmly. "What's gonna happen?"

Tony shrugs, setting the iPad down, "There's going to be someone who reads it, and a lawyer present. They're gonna go through a piece of paper and say who gets what, that will be you. And then they'll leave. That's...about it."

"I meant about us," Peter said softly, avoiding Tony's gaze. "The earlier conversation, the one that keeps getting interrupted."

Oh. Tony sets down the iPad and nods, scratching his head, "Uh. Well, heck the door and make sure no one else plans to crash in," he smiles weakly. Peter glances to the door with a smirk before they settle into silence. When their gazes meet, Tony takes a breath, "Well if there is a name listed, there's nothing I can do once that will is read. The person listed has to become your legal guardian. But then I'd pull a bunch of strings to get you back if we can't get consent from that person. Can

you think of anyone she would put down?"

Peter squeezes his eyes shut and racks his brain, coming to an empty conclusion. He shakes his head, "No. No family, and no friends she would trust enough. But she's got to have put someone, right?" He almost seems sad, as if by not having a name it meant May didn't care about him. Also he didn't say her name, Tony caught that.

"I don't know what's gonna be on that paper, kid. I know she loved you, and cared about you, so that means whatever she has on there will be for your best interests," he insisted.

Peter gives a small sad smile. "She always took care of me," he muttered quietly, his jaw clenching, his hands starting to shake. Tony could tell he was holding everything back, and part of him wanted Peter to let it go, to break, just so that he could help Peter pick everything up, and not be so concerned about him shattering. Peter was like a fragile piece of glass that Tony knew was about to give.

He feels his eyes sting at the kid's pain and he reaches for Peter's shoulder, "I know she did, which means she won't stop now. And whatever is on that paper, Pete, we'll-" he locks gazes with the kid and gives him an encouraging nod. "We'll figure it out, okay? We always figure it out," he adds with a small smile.

Peter rubs his eye with the back of his fist and takes a shaky breath to compose himself, giving Tony no time to reprimand him on concealing his true emotions and pain he is obviously in. He presses two knuckles against his temples and rubs in circles, "Okay. Okay, yeah. So if there's no name then...then what happens?" Neither of them have said it for real, have they? That it meant Tony adopting Peter. Not since he shouted YES at the solution Peter had brought up as a joke.

"Then it will work out. After a lot of paperwork, it becomes official," Tony says, trying to hide the enthusiasm in his voice so he doesn't sway the kid one way or another. "It's all up to you of course," he adds quickly. "It's whatever you want, kid."

Peter nods and runs his hand over his face, "And when is the will gonna be here?"

Tony shrugs, "They have it ready whenever we notify them. We can wait a bit if you want?"

Peter shakes his head and suddenly standing, "No. No, can we do it now?"

Tony blinks, "Now?"

"Yes," Peter says.

Tony looks at his watch and asks, "Like right now?"

"Yes," Peter insists. There's an odd look in his eye. It's the look of someone who is tired of hurting and just wants things to be fixed, while he still has the energy to fix them. Peter was becoming drained, his energy leaving him, as the death of his Aunt took over. The kid wanted to have some composure left when this was decided and he didn't blame him. Tony opens his mouth and then swallows his words, nodding slowly. Okay, well this was unexpected, but of course he would honor the kid's wish.

"Yeah, kid. FRIDAY, can you make it happen and alert the team?" he flicks his gaze to Peter, afraid he's overstepped. "If you want to have them come, I'm sure they'll-"

"They're my family. They always have been," Peter says firmly.

Tony smiles and nods and says, "FRIDAY?" His proud and happy gaze doesn't leave Peter's and there's a ghost of a smile on the kid's face past the pursed lips and tear filled eyes.

"On it. My approximation is that they can be here in two hours."

"Thanks FRIDAY," Tony said, looking down and pulling the iPad into his lap, texting Steve separately to make sure one of the conference rooms was open. "Kid, you're sure about this?"

Peter comes over and sinks down into the seat next to him. He shakes his head, "No." He rubs a hand in his messy hair and his voice cracks as he admits, "Tony, I- right now I'm not sure of anything. But this I can do. So I'm gonna do it." He suddenly frowns, his brow furrowing, "What about her funeral?" he asked nervously, his eyes going wide, "Do I have to- do I have to do anything? Or the apartment- I can't pay or school? What's gonna happen with school- but that's later, God I'm so selfish- the funeral. Tony what do I do for-"

"Peter, Peter, hey," Tony reaches over and grasps his arm, steadying him. The kid's breathing had gotten faster in the last second alone, his eyes darting back and forth as his entire body tensed. Peter relaxed at his supportive touch and tried to compose himself, ducking his head to his chin and curling his hand into a fist. The kid was in pain. The kid was hurting. And there was nothing Tony could do.

"I got everything under control. The apartment, the funeral, you don't need to worry," Tony said quietly.

"I'm not sure and I don't know what to do," Peter cried out weakly, putting his head in his hand and taking big breaths. "And I don't think I ever will. So I guess I just have to accept that. Because Tony, I have no idea what to do." He was still pressing hard against the dam that held everything up, still desperately trying to compose himself. Tony didn't miss the tear that dropped to the table and landed with a small splat. He stared at it and let go of Peter's arm, bringing his hand up to rest on Peter's hand and card through his curls.

"It hurts and I just- I don't know what to do," The kid's shoulders shook and he didn't look up. The worst part was that this was still shock. He had seen it in Peter's eyes, the fear of why it didn't hurt as much as it should, the fear of knowing why it didn't hurt as much as it should, and the fear of when it actually did hurt. The kid was scared because he was already falling apart and didn't know how to get back up. He didn't want to get back up because in his experience he would just be kicked down again.

Tony didn't say anything out loud, but he said quite a bit silently. He knew the kid was hurting, unsure of what to do since his life had just been flipped over and crumpled into a ball. And Peter still thought he was being selfish by merely thinking about school. He was taking it one step at a time, because that's all he could focus on without completely losing the composure he had furiously built up. Like Tony he covered his feelings with jokes and smiles, bursts of emotion and breakdowns that only happened when no one was around.

Tony only had one thing to worry about, to protect, to love, to care for- and that was this kid. He had let him down before, way too many times, and was not prepared to let that happen again. They were all each other had. And maybe they didn't know what to do, and maybe that was bad, but maybe it wasn't. Because they were both alive. Yes, they were both in pain, but that too would pass with time. This time, Tony wasn't going to walk out. He would be helping Peter walk forward, with his arm around the kid.

So they sat there, in complete silence, Peter silently crying as Tony just rested his hand on his head, rubbing his thumb along the kid's curls.

It wasn't much.

But it was enough.

2 and a half hours later

"I'm sorry we're gathering under these circumstances so soon," the man said, shaking hands with Peter and Tony who were seated at the front of the table. The Avengers were scattered around the other seats of the conference room, eyes trained on the man and his coworker who had an open briefcase on the center of the table.

He looked at Peter and gave him a smile of compassion, "I'm very sorry for your loss son, but it seems you have a lot of people willing to take care of you here."

Peter gave him a small smile and a nod, not wanting to speak in fear his voice would crack. The man understands and takes out a couple papers, too far away with tiny writing that even Peter can't see from this far. The man straightens them and clasps his hands.

"First thing to discuss, May Parker did alter her will roughly one year ago, for the record. Her assets will all go directly to Mr. Parker," the man nodded, reading off of the paper. "If you would like me to list them out, I can?"

Tony shakes his head as he sees Peter's hand curl and the kid tense. He wanted to get out of this room, Tony could tell. He gives a weak cocky smile, trying to keep up the act and keep the attention off the kid, "It's fine, I have people who can settle it."

The man's gaze also flicks to Peter and he nods at Tony in understanding, "Understood. I have a copy of all the following documents for you to keep, the official copies will be kept in records. I'll give you the folder when we're done."

"Thank you," Tony says, eyeing Peter carefully. The kid's eyes are filled with tears and he's blinking, taking breaths that are very staggered, probably because he can't breathe. His face is turning red and Tony can tell his lungs are tight. Peter's not even fidgeting like he usually is, it's taking everything for him to stay still and not say a word. Tony needs to get him out of here, and soon. "I think everything else is taken care of, we just need to know if she has someone listed under legal guardian for her nephew?" he asks politely.

"We can review all the other matters after," Rhodey adds helpfully. Tony shoots him a look of grateful support.

"Certainly," the man nods at his request. He switches to the piece of paper in the middle of the stack and fixes his glasses, "For listed legal guardian..."

No name, Tony pleads. No name.

Peter's first is curled.

The kid doesn't even look like he's breathing.

No name, Peter thinks. No name.

The man's eyes skim the paper and stop at the bottom.

Tony's heart shatters. No. He can't lose the kid again. Not again. Not after they were just starting to get back to how they were.

Peter finally sucks in a small breath and looks down, squeezing his eyes shut as the man in front of him starts to speak. He shouldn't have said to do this so early. It was so rushed upon them, there was no transition, no lead up, no waiting period, no time to prepare. He could be torn away from his home, from his family. Families were meant to piss you off, and Peter knew that now. But this place was his home. This is where he belonged. He had never admitted it to Tony but he was the closest thing he had to father and Peter could have just rushed the last few days he had with him simply because he wanted to get over this.

Please God, anyone, just don't let there be a name. He can't lose the closest thing he has to a son, he can't lose the one kid he was supposed to protect. He can't lose the kid he has failed over and over and over again, right before he was going to it up to him. He had a lifetime to prove to Peter how much he cared for him, and now the kid could be stripped away and off to another country, or another state, out of his life and out of his world. Please, let there be no name. Let him make it up to the kid, and for once do something right. Peter deserved better. No name-

The man speaks as the room hangs on every word, tension building.

"There is a name listed."

Both Tony and Peter hang their heads as their world comes crashing down. White spots threaten to overtake their vision and they feel lightheaded. Their stomach flips and a knot is ruthlessly yanked tight in their guts. Peter's fist curls tighter and starts to shake, beet red. Tony is afraid he'll draw blood. There's tears in both of their eyes as they straighten.

"Okay," Tony makes out, attempting to clear his throat since his voice broke. "Okay."

The man reads the mood of the room, not only from the two people in front of him, but the reactions of the other Avengers all sitting behind them. He stutters, hating to add onto the pain, "There is also a very short attached statement as to the legal guardian. Would you like me to read it?" he asks slowly, well aware of Peter's state.

Tony is about to croak out a no, but someone else beats him to it. The battered and beaten and saddened kid next to him whispers, "Yes. Please." Tony looks over and sees Peter is crying, tears sliding down his cheeks and onto his shirt. They turn the fabric a darker shade, but he hears nothing coming from him, just drops falling down his face. The boy who lost his entire family, and is now about to lose it for the second time, just wants to hear the one thing that May has to say to him.

The man nods and clears his throat, "Peter. It's all going to be just fine. Be strong, and live your life. I have no doubt I made the right decision here. You need someone to take care of you, who loves you as much as I do. I trust them, and I know you do too. I love you."

Peter makes a small noise that only Tony can hear but it breaks his heart into a million pieces. It's a half whimper, half strained sob. The kid hangs his head and does not say anything else. Tony tears his gaze away from the boy and straightens his tie, cursing the suit that he had put on. Everything seemed so...wrong. So backwards. He barely has the strength to ask, "The person. The legal guardian she listed? Who is it?"

Silence.

The man looks up and says, "It's...you, sir."

Peter's eyes shoot open. Tony blinks and his head snaps up, "What?"

The man nods and repeats, "It says Tony Stark."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapterrrrr coming soooooon. How was this one? Super crazy at the end ik although some of you already called this?!?!?!? You all are just that amazing of readers ig XD We are NOT done :) Still more to come, and next chapter is gonna be a tearjerker, so...tissues. Yeet. ANYWAY, I don't want to give too much away but I have plans for about 3 more chapters, so if you have any other ideas drop them down there (bad news is vacation is soon for me and it's for like 9 days so teehee hope I finish before then otherwise you all be gettin a long hiatus :() ANYWAY ON A HAPPIER NOTE, Peter punched Ross!!!! YAY! And Steve got punched by Pepper! YAY! Well boo. And a lot happened haha

Sooooooooooooooooooooo I hope you all enjoyed :) Leave a comment, I love hearing from you guys yall are the absolute best and I hope you have an awesome day and are enjoying summer. Drink coffee! XD

Until next time, which will be sooner XD my life has gotten less crazy thank God I love you all 3000 <3

You Are My Anchor

Chapter Summary

PLEASE READ THE END NOTE!

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely awesome readers :) ikr this is a little early isnt it? MUAHAHAH. lol i had a great name thought up and then i just clicked post and forgot to name it arent I hilarious. Gonnnaaaa go get coffee cuz I def need it.

I hope you are having a great day!!!! Thank you guys so so much for all of the super amazing and encouraging comments and support, I cannot say that enough. This story has def been one of the biggest I've written and its almost at like 23 k views?!?! Like wow dang thank you?!?! <3 <3 We arent gonna talk about word count *looks away* anyways thank you guys for sticking with this, i really appreciate and promise much more to come! I love all of you so much :)

This chapter is a fun one, I had a blast writing it, and hope it meets expectations cuz a lot is about to go downnnnnnn

I was writing and was like okay so I should make like half of the chapter them talking and then- oh crap thats like 8k wellllllllllllllll guess it's the whole chapter then. I

REALLY like this chapter and I have a feeling (I hope) you all will too. Many have been waiting for a certain three letter word that starts with h and ends with ug soooooo.

Its like an angst comfort ow yay kinda chapter so enjoy! <3

Read on awesome people!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's never been more quiet in the conference room. You could have heard a pin drop. Everyone's gazes are on Tony or Peter, the two look exactly the same.

Tony finds his voice after a solid ten seconds of nothing. "Just...one more time," he croaks, licking his lips, his eyes wide. His heart is beating out of his chest and he stutters, "W-who?"

"You, sir. It says Tony Stark." The man smiles slightly and spins the paper around, moving it forward. Tony grips the sides of his chair with shaking hands. Then he leans across the table and looks, seeing the bolded name- his name, staring back at him.

Holy crap.

He remembers how to breathe again and blinks. Then he moves his hands and remembers how to use his muscles. Tony turns to Peter who has his eyes trained on him with the same expression. It's firm and questioning, full of worry, disbelief, and fear of false hope. He's asking. He trusts Tony's answer, he trusts *him*, not the man. Tony gives him a slow nod with a small smile.

Peter's expression changes and for a second he's overcome with relief. But then his face continues falling and his eyes narrow. Tony cocks his head, turning further toward him out of concern. Peter's

breath hitches and he suddenly grips the sides of the chair and stands, pushing it backwards. His breathing speeds up and the kid suddenly looks awful, like Tony does when he's having a panic attack-

Shoot, he's having a panic attack. On top of everything. The kid is obviously in shock and he moves to the side, pushing the chair out of his way as he trips over it. It clatters to the floor and Peter jumps, staring at it in fear, his hand clenching at his side.

"Pete," Tony says quietly, trying to lock eyes with him because if he can he knows he can get the kid to calm down. But Peter's gaze is wandering and he's blinking, tears clouding his vision as well as whatever is going on inside his head. "Peter," Tony says again, more firmly this time.

The teen stumbles, before he looks around the room and shakes his head. He then suddenly turns on his heel, croaking out, "I'm sorry, I- I'm sorry- I have to-" He pushes past Sam and Bucky who are standing towards the back and practically falls through the doors. They close behind him and in a second Tony shoots up out of his seat and is following him, but he forgets about his bad leg and it buckles. He grabs for the chair but it falls under his hand.

Steve's arms close around him, supporting him before he can hit the ground. "I got ya, Tones," he assures him, straightening him. Tony is breathing hard, his gaze focused on the door that Peter had just ran out of. He left, Tony realized. He bolted and left.

Steve is already moving for the door, reading his mind. Tony pats him on the chest as they stumble forward, leaning on his friend until he can regain his footing. Sam gives them both a nod as he pushes the handle forward, helping them get out quicker. Tony can hear Rhodey talking behind them, but he's looking for Peter once he crosses through the doorway, wondering where that boy went in the five seconds he had lost sight of him. Separation anxiety, because that's the best thing he could describe it as, was already kicking in. He didn't want that kid out of his sight, and he was already panicking. Not only that, but the fact that Peter had ran in the first place was scaring him. Did he not want this? Was it out of fear? Peter wasn't one to chose flight as his split second instinct, or run away from situations.

"We'll take care of them," Steve says, motioning to the conference room they had left as he helps him forward, snapping Tony out of his troubling thoughts. Cap eases himself out from under Tony's arm once he knows he's regained his balance. "You go follow the k-" they both look around in dismay. Peter is nowhere to be found. The hallways and glass rooms are empty. Tony's heart is clenched with a cold fist and his nervous gaze darts around.

"Darn it Peter," he mutters in worry. All the conference rooms are locked and none of the doors are open. Where the heck could he have gone? The only other door was the one to the steps next to the window. Even the weather represented how Tony was feeling. Rain pours down so hard outside he can barely see past the first tree-

Oh.

"Crap," Tony curses, his face falling even more.

"I know, he could be anywhere," Steve says, not looking at him, turning around to search the long hallways again. "Do you want me to help look?" he suggests.

"No, no," Tony assures him. He points to the window. "Crap, meaning crap, it's raining. I know where he is. You said you'd finish up in there for us?" he reiterates.

"Yeah," Steve nods in confusion before brushing it off. Tony and Peter knew each other like a

book, so he wasn't surprised Tony figured it out within seconds.

"Thanks," Tony says, moving for the steps. But before he can, a hand is claspig his shoulder. He turns and meets Steve's unsure look.

"You're really gonna go through with this aren't you?" he asked, cocking his head.

"Yeah," Tony said simply.

"You never wanted to have..." Steve trails off.

Kids, Tony thinks, a family? Yeah, it wasn't really his thing. Until Peter. "I know," he says.

Steve blinks. Tony usually had a long answer to everything that had a sarcastic bite to the end, a response that made you feel stupid for asking the question in the first place. It was something Steve had gotten used to, so it was a shock when Tony came back with one worded sentences, his tone firm and serious. Steve spoke slowly to his best friend, "It's...a really big thing, Tony. Even for you," he adds with a questioning smirk.

Tony sucks in a breath and nods, "Yeah. Yeah, I know."

"Like what about Stark Industries? Wouldn't it...fall to him now?" Steve asked.

"It already was going to fall to him," Tony admitted quietly.

"Oh," Steve said in shock, his eyes widening. "Okay." He nods, looking at Tony's expression. He thought of Peter. He thought of the two of them, Peter holding him protectively, his eyes flashing as Steve kicked down the wall and saw them in flames, or Tony a mess and holding a glass the minute he and Peter had gone their seperate ways. He remembered seeing them smiling while he passed the lab on a random Thursday night before all of this, or Peter giving Tony a dirty look behind his back when they got into an argument about his homework. He takes a breath.

"Well then I guess that makes me an Uncle now," he shrugs. Tony grins and Steve gives him a small smile in return before he points, starting to make his way back to the conference room. "You got him?"

"I got him," Tony repeats, starting for the steps. He closes the door behind him and groans, holding his leg. That twist getting out of the chair had not done any favors, and now Tony had a flight of steps to climb. But Peter was alone and hurting. So Tony took the stairs two at a time.

He finally reached the landing after about a minute of struggling, his leg burning and sending sharp flashes of pain throughout his body. He gripped the railing and grabbed the umbrella he kept by the door and tucked it under his elbow so he could yank open the door to the roof. Rain suddenly hits him and Tony frowns, taking out his phone and leaving it on the ground by the door.

It's pouring outside, and like the window, Tony can barely see a couple feet in front of him, but he still manages to catch sight of the teenager who is standing, leaning against the railing near the stone edge, his head dropped to his chest. It's evening, so it's dark out, and besides the heat lighting littering the sky a couple miles away, the moon is pretty much the only thing illuminating the roof. Maybe other people would have called out to the kid first, to maybe see if he would come inside. Other people would have spent the extra second putting up the umbrella he had just grabbed. Other people wouldn't have walked out into the pouring rain.

Tony wasn't other people.

He steps through the door and begins walking, immediately drenched with only a second of exposure. The rain is coming down in buckets and Tony blinks water from his eyes. He hates water. It's cold and it sends shivers down his back. His hands start to shake. He tries not to think about how it feels, the drops sliding down his face, soaking his shirt, flattening his hair around his head and sliding across his lips. He blinks drops off his eyelashes so that he can see where he's going. As he gets closer, the fears slowly dissipate and he narrows his eyes and focuses on his kid.

"Pete!" he calls. The teen doesn't look up. His hand is in his pocket and he's shivering, freezing cold. Rain is sliding off of him, dropping off his curls. Tony walks over and shrugs off his suit coat that's still relatively dry on the inside. He drapes the jacket around the kid's shoulders before he opens the umbrella and positions it over Peter. Suddenly realizing that with the wind it's futile, he curses and mutters, "Ah, what the hell." He throws it to the side and it skitters across the roof. Then he eases himself next to Peter, leaning back against the railing.

Peter still doesn't talk. The rain is furiously loud, and thunder rumbles in the distance. Tony looks up and drops fall onto his face. He leans forward and asks, "Peter, you do know it's raining, right?"

The kid chokes on a laugh. Then he hears his voice, "Y-yeah. Yeah, I do."

"You- you know it's pouring...right?" Tony asks again, staring to smile.

Peter smirks and nods, "Yeah." The suit jacket begins to fall off and Peter doesn't make a move for it, his eyes glued to the ground, filled with tears. Tony snags it with his good arm, tucking it over Peter's shoulders again, the kid still shivering.

He winces and looks over the kid in concern, blinking through the rain, "Pete, you're freezing-"

"I don't care," Peter snaps.

"Well I do," Tony shoots back almost instantly. Both of their gazes clash for a second, burning, before simmering down and breaking off. They lapse into silence before Tony smirks, "So...do you want to talk? Yell? Lay your head on my good shoulder and we can both cry it out?"

"And put in a Meg Ryan movie too?" Peter asks with an eyebrow raised. "Yeah, no thanks."

"Okay, well I'm not going inside until you talk to me," Tony says with a shrug, "So if you planned to figure out your problems alone in the pouring rain on the roof, you can scratch out the alone part." Tony looks over at him, ignoring the feeling of water sliding down his face and soaking into his clothes as he tugs his coat closer. His voice is soft and gentle. "What happened back there, kid?"

"I needed some air," Peter says tightly.

"Did I mention it's raining?" Tony joked.

"Yes, yes, you mentioned that three times now," Peter said furiously, his gaze flashing. Tony blinked. Peter squeezed his eyes shut and said, "Sorry. I didn't mean to snap."

"You want to tell me what's going on?" Tony asked quietly.

Peter shook his head and wouldn't meet his eyes, "No. No, not really."

"Okay, can you tell me anyway?" Tony suggested.

Peter's hands are shaking and he mutters, "Do you- do you remember when I told you that it didn't

even hurt yet?" he asks quietly, rain sliding off his nose since his head was bowed to his chest. Tony nods visibly. As a result, Peter runs a hand through his soaking hair, pushing away the bangs that are flattened against his forehead and cries, "Well it's starting to hurt now. And then when I just heard that letter and saw the will it just...everything came crashing down and I felt like I couldn't move or escape it and..."

Tony's heart breaks. He searches for something to say, but can't seem to find the right words.

"I miss her," Peter says angrily, and that's how Tony knows he hasn't completely broken, not yet at least. He wasn't sad, he was angry. "I think for a second I'm gonna go home and she's gonna come back in a couple of days and then I remember-" the kid is shaking and he grits his teeth. "How do I just forget something like that? I heard it happen, I know it happened but I just...I don't want it to be true."

"That's not a crime," Tony assured him.

"Yes it is! She was the last bit of my past that I had left. And now she's-" Peter trails off, his hand curled into a fist. "The least I can do is honor her memory and stop acting like she's still alive." He lowers his head and Tony can't tell what's rain and what are tears that are sliding down his cheeks.

"Peter," he says quietly. "You miss her. You don't deserve any of this, how you handle it is up to you. Don't go beating yourself up about it just because you're human."

"I'm not human," Peter hisses. Tony doesn't miss the flex Peter does with his hand and the distaste the kid has in his gaze when looking at his palms.

Tony falters. He doesn't know what to say to that. Peter had never...not wanted to be Spiderman. The fact that he had been brought this low killed him. But Peter may not have been 100% human, sure he climbed up walls, but he was still a highschooler, who could bleed, who had bled, and who could feel pain. Peter needed to know that. So Tony turned and grabbed Peter's good arm, before he pinched down on it. The boy hissed in shock, yanking his arm away.

"What the hell?" he demanded, rubbing the spot near his elbow.

"You're human," Tony said simply. Peter's expression fell and Tony nodded, "You go to school, you get a B on your math test every once in a while, you drink water, you breathe air, you have the biggest heart I know, and the most telling feature? You feel pain," he says quietly. Peter's expression softens as his lips purse. Tony smiles sadly, "You're still a kid. You're a 16 year old who lost his aunt. You may have sticky fingers but you aren't invincible. Peter, you still have feelings."

"Everyone around me gets hurt," Peter swears darkly, shaking his head violently, curling his hand into a fist. "My parents died. Ben died. And now May-" He looks up at Tony with tear filled eyes, blinking through the pouring rain.

"I'm sorry, kid," Tony said quietly, lowering his head. He only had a fraction of a clue as to what Peter was going through. Sure he lost his parents too at a young age but he didn't know what was worse, losing two parents and growing up alone, or having the pain spread out across the years like Peter.

The boy spoke, breaking the silence, the rain pouring down in buckets. They were both dripping wet and neither cared. Somehow Tony could still hear the kid. He always heard him. Peter's voice was quiet and timid, "I know I've said this before, but I get why you did it. I told myself that I would never understand, after you walked out. I told myself I would never feel the same way, or

understand what you did or why." Tony's gaze breaks and Peter nods, swallowing a sob. "But I've now felt the exact same way, twice. Once when you took that bullet, and again a couple minutes ago. You want to know what happened in that room?" he asked. Tony nodded. "I just wanted to get away from you. So much was happening and it felt like I was drowning in the unknown. I recognized why I was there, May dead because of me, and I realized I was putting you in danger. Because I've grown to realize if I get close to someone, they get hurt. Which is why I needed to get out of there because I didn't want you getting hurt because of me too, more than you already have. Which is exactly what you felt like. The difference was you came after me, and I didn't even take one step to follow you after you walked out the door."

The last sentence came out in a torrent of words, and the minute Peter said them it looked like he tried to take them back. Tony stared at him. "None of this was your fault, kid."

"I just- didn't want you to get hurt," Peter said again, trying to make his voice more firm.

Tony turns to face him, "Peter, we're out of that hell hole, we're back home. We're not getting hurt anymore."

"I'm talking about your name on that paper," Peter said miserably.

"What about it?" Tony demanded out of curiosity and worry. "How will that hurt me?"

"Tony, you shouldn't..." Peter spoke quietly, "You shouldn't do this. You really need to think about this, and I mean really think about it." At Tony's shocked expression Peter turns to him, insisting, "No, I'm serious. I break everything I touch. Everyone around me gets hurt. But I don't even feel pain when a family member dies because of me. I just try and cope by pretending I'm fine- how messed up is that? I don't play football because if I did, I'd kill half the people on the team by accident, I-I make star wars references 24/7 and still play with legos, I'm Spiderman, I have a lot of issues, I go around punching generals-"

Tony smirks, "You're acting like I don't know all that."

Peter glares at him, "Tony, I'm serious. W-we had a fight! A big one!"

"Thanks for reminding me, I forgot," he drawled before nodding. Tony shrugged, "And?"

"And what...if...that screws stuff up?" Peter demands weakly, clearly grasping at straws.

"Well I'm not gonna let it screw stuff up, are you?" Tony asks innocently.

Peter makes a face, "No, of course not."

"Well there we go, it's settled," Tony said happily.

"No," Peter says angrily, and Tony realizes that the kid is serious. The kid wasn't just saying it to warn him, he was trying to convince him. It hurt Tony to know that Peter cared about him enough to try and convince him to get away. It felt very twistedly familiar and Tony hated it. He hated the sound of Peter's voice as it hit his ears, and the expression on the kid's face. "You shouldn't do this. You shouldn't..." he trails off and finally asks, "Why do you want me? Tony, I'm a mess."

"You think I'm not?" Tony demands with a snort.

"I've punched three people in three days," Peter says dryly, shooting him a look.

"And my record is seven in two, so get on my level," Tony grins.

"One of them was you," Peter growled, turning towards him.

Tony grins as he turns to him as well, "Well I deserved it, didn't I?"

Peter's face falls and he splutters, "Is this a joke to you?"

"Yes!" Tony admits. "Kid, you're asking why I want to adopt you? You? The perfect kid? Peter, you're a genius, you don't do drugs, at least I hope you don't, you're addicted to Monster energy drinks so I think it's safe to say you're not into alcohol, you save people on a regular basis, you fit right in around here, the Avengers love you, you outshine all of us- do you want me to continue?" He was going to anyway because they were missing the major point here, "You put up with me even after everything I did, so let's ask the real question here, why would you want *me*?"

Peter scoffs and Tony shakes his head, "Kid, your arguments are that you quote Star Wars and don't play football, how about me? I'm a hot mess, I-" Tony falters and shakes his head. He doesn't want to go through all the mistakes in his life. From before and after he became Iron Man. The people he had let die. The people he had failed. The destruction he had caused. The horror he had unleashed on the world. The mess he made trying to clean it up. The friendships he had almost shattered. The people he had pushed away. What he did to the kid standing in front of him, asking to leave him because he was afraid that he wasn't enough for Tony?

His gaze shows the terrifying things he had seen, the horror he had been through, the pain he had caused. Tony knows he has a haunting gaze and between that and his voice he mumbles, "Peter, I'm Tony Stark." That sentence alone explains everything. He weakly smiles and turns to face forward again because he doesn't feel like he should be facing the boy, muttering, "I'm the last person you should want. You're the one who's making the wrong decision here."

There's silence and Tony focuses on the rain.

"I might just punch you again," Peter snarls after a second, shaking his head. He wipes his face, rain sliding over his hand. It hadn't slowed down, it was still pouring. That response didn't surprise him.

"Peter, I'm not lying here. I am the last person that should have been on that paper. I'm reckless, everyone around me gets hurt too, especially you. And after May..." he trailed off and looked down. Other people might have taken that as respect for her memory, or Tony being equally saddened or caution of Peter's emotions dealing with her death. Peter wasn't other people. He knew exactly what this was. It was guilt. Confirming his suspicions, Tony choked out, "It was my fault. It was all my fault."

Peter shook his head, "No-"

"You said it yourself kid," Tony said, with tears in his eyes, Peter could see them even through the pouring rain. "People say the truth when they're angry. Deep down you know it was my fault."

Peter shakes his head and turns to him, "Tony, it wasn't."

Tony bites his cheek and tries to smile, turning away and nodding. Peter feels his eyes sting. The man's voice is small, "May wouldn't want me to... I- I don't think, if she knew what I put you through, what happened to you- to her because of me-"

"She put your name on that paper," Peter said firmly. "It's that simple. Tony, your name was on that paper for a reason. What happened wasn't your fault. You know she would tell you that-"

"You don't get it kid," Tony says weakly.

"I do get it!" Peter shoots back.

"No, you don't!" Tony counters furiously. "I can't protect you!"

"You have!" Peter yells, his gaze flashing. "Tony..." His gaze is filled with love, with confusion, trying to understand why Tony couldn't see the million times he had put himself in front to save him, thrown an arm across his chest to shield him, defended him, pulled him back and stepped in front- "You took a bullet for me, and you didn't even think twice."

"Kid, you're-" Tony shakes his head and points, referencing the past, "A couple hours ago we made it clear that I can't protect you. You said it yourself."

Peter shakes his head, "That's not what we decided-"

"Then what was it?" Tony demands.

"That you can't *always* protect me," Peter corrects. "But Tony, if there is one person in this world that I know will have my back, come whatever, who will be there for me to step in front, to defend me, to save me, it's you. You've proved that."

"Proved that?" Tony demanded. "Peter, I walked away!"

"And look at us now," Peter spread his hand out and gave a light laugh as he gulped down a sob. "We're back."

Tony looks at him with a broken gaze and says nothing. Silence speaks louder than any words he could ever say, and Peter knows that.

"Tony, I may still snap at you, and we will still fight about what happened. I know that, because three months was a long time to have anger piling up," he said quietly. "And it just doesn't go away with one talk. That goes both ways. I have crap to still answer for, I know that too. But...but I want you to know I do forgive you. For everything. You need to know that if..." Peter waves his hand forward and averts his gaze.

"Me too, kid," Tony says quietly and they both stare straight ahead.

"By the way I'm sorry for punching you," Peter turns to him with a wince.

Tony makes a face and bites his cheek, "It's fine, I just know I've got to win rock paper sc-"

"No, three months ago," Peter corrects awkwardly. "I punched you then too."

Tony recalls it with a slight smirk and chuckles, "Yeah, yeah you did."

"I punch you a lot," Peter realizes guiltily.

"Twice is hardly a lot," Tony raises an eyebrow.

"Still," Peter mumbles insistingly. "I'm sorry."

"My face thanks you I guess," Tony shrugs with a small smile.

They go back into silence, thunder rumbling quietly a couple miles away. Clouds roll and heat lightning continues. Tony's drenched from head to toe and he can feel water in his shoes as he shifts his weight from foot to foot.

"And you didn't kill May," Peter says quietly.

The rain seems to slow. Peter's voice echoes in his ears, sending his eyes flying open, his heart clenching. Tony's head snaps up at that and he looks over at Peter in shock, guilt, and horror. Peter shakes his head and continues, setting his jaw and Tony can tell the kid is desperately trying to keep his voice from shaking, "You didn't. Damian did. I'm sorry I ever said that to you. I needed someone to blame, someone to take the weight off of my shoulders. Selfish, I know. Just like how I left that room. I thought if I could get away, it would help. Because I didn't want to break in front of you, and worse, I didn't want to take it out on you. Because you don't deserve that."

He wipes his face again, water trailing over his knuckles. He blinks drops from his lashes as tears combine with the rain falling down his face, "Tony, I left that room because something good happened. Your name was on that paper. And good things haven't happened recently. So I ran. Because I didn't know what else to do. I ran because I was actually happy, and part of me feels like I shouldn't be, because May is dead, and it hasn't hit yet. And it hit then. My entire world came crashing down and- and I don't know I was thinking. Because I ran away from the one person that could help me put it back together. But you still found me, you came out in the pouring rain and haven't left. So tell me, 'Tony Stark', how that makes you a hot mess?"

"Fine, I have my moments." Tony smirks and runs a hand over his face, rubbing his soaking wet hair that is flattened on his head. "Well while we're confessing and apologizing and all of this..." Tell him. He'll say it. He'll say it. He's saying it. "Peter...my greatest fear probably isn't what you think."

"Me getting hurt," Peter grinned knowingly, and quite a bit proudly.

"No," Tony admitted. Peter tried not to show his dismay but he couldn't help but slump his shoulders. Tony is quick to continue, because the kid was right, it revolved about him, and in a way he was right, but for once he was going to go into detail about how much the kid meant to him. It was the least he could do. "It's failing you," Tony said, "by becoming my father."

Peter looked over at him with a furrowed brow. All the kid had known about him was from the news and a couple magazines that Tony kept tucked away in drawers of the lab. But Tony knew he didn't miss the subtle hints he had thrown in casual conversation, or the face he instinctively made whenever someone mentioned him. Peter was observant but he never continued the conversation further because he knew Tony didn't want to. So it was time to continue the conversation.

Tony lowered his gaze and bit his lip, "I- I was a carbon copy of him growing up, because he wouldn't have it any other way. I did everything just like him because I was going to take over the company and didn't need to just fill the shoes, but wear the exact same ones. And for a long time I was like that. I sold weapons that brought mass destruction on the people I vowed to protect. Then I had my little vacation to Afghanistan and it helped me see that his vision was wrong, that I didn't need to honor his legacy but still letting him have a hold over me from the grave. I had wanted to get away from my father in many ways, mostly because I knew I *was* him. I was carrying on something I didn't want any part in."

Tony scoffed quietly, and rubbed a hand over his face, admitting, "And he definitely didn't win dad of the year award; he never told me he loved me- he didn't even tell me that he liked me. So when I became Iron Man, I vowed to never be like him, in any way, ever again. I changed the company, I changed what I believed in, what actions I took to accomplish what *I* wanted...I changed. And then I met you some years later and..." Tony trailed off before he mumbled, "I was always worried about starting a family because I knew that would mean I could become my father. And I never wanted that for my kid. And I don't want that for you." He took a deep breath, staring straight

ahead, "Pete, I- truth be told, I'm terrified. I have a dark past. I have demons. I am not a saint, whatsoever," he shakes his head, his expression falling as he whispers, "the things I've done, the things I've had to do...it's bad."

"So?" Peter shrugs.

Tony blinks. He had just spilled out an entire speech, all these reasons, this compelling argument of why the kid should wake up, turn around and sprint as fast as he could the other way. And how does Peter respond? With a one worded question, in the pouring rain, disregarding everything Tony had just said.

"I am the last person on the list for this role," Tony insists. "Kid, you need to realize that. I've said it before and I will say it again, you have a faith, trust, and admiration for me and I don't know where it's coming from."

"You missed a word," Peter mumbled quietly.

"What?" Tony asked.

"You missed a word," Peter repeated, locking eyes with him.

Tony knows exactly what he's talking about. He breaks into a tiny and shocked smile. He is glad for the rain so that Peter doesn't see the tears in his eyes. "You're right. I did forget a word. Point is, kid, I don't want to fail you, because of that last word that we can never seem to say out loud." *Love*. "But- but I already have failed you. And that- that scares me." He laughs lightly and shakes his head, "And not much scares me, but you...kid you deserve better, Peter you deserve someone who..." Tony smiles, "I can't even put it into words. But the point I'm trying to make is that someone is not me."

"You done?" Peter asks with narrowed eyes, looking like someone who is tired of listening to someone complain about their day.

Tony scoffs in disbelief and blinks, exclaiming, "You're unbelievable!"

"No, your case was very compelling, I'll give you that," Peter assures him.

"I came out here to comfort *you*, not the other way around," Tony said angrily.

"Don't worry," Peter grins, "by the end of this conversation I'll be on the ground and you'll be the one hugging me."

"Did you even listen to a word I said?" Tony asked, making a face.

Peter nodded, "Yeah, and it was all crap. This place has been my home for two years, Tony. And you have been-" Peter stops. He looks down and suddenly the rain is so loud in the deafening silence. They both listen to it for a couple seconds before Peter says firmly, "Well...you know what you've been. At least I hope you do. And it was nothing like your father." He doesn't miss the smile that finds its way onto Tony's face.

"I will only go through with this if you want me to," Tony says, looking over at him.

Peter locks eyes with him and searches his gaze. Then he knows what he has to make clear. "Before I say anything, I need you to know something. You have to know May would have wanted this. She clearly did," Peter says, turning on the big puppy eyes that always got to him. He realized why Peter was bringing this up. Tony never gave him a solid answer as to whether or not he

thought he was responsible for May's death. Peter had come up here because it had all rushed at him at once in the conference room and he was mistaking shock for not being human. May was the reason this was all happening, she was a massive part of Peter's life, and this was her choice. Peter was not only reminding Tony of that, but also himself. "She didn't even tell you, Tony! She just knew. She put your name down for a reason."

"Pete-" Tony said brokenly.

"You didn't kill her," Peter says, half sobbing, his eyes welling with tears. "I'm sorry I ever said that to you, Tony, you have to know that. These past two days you've carried me, you do get that right?" he said, near crying as he screwed up his face, emotion clouding it. "Every weight I have shoved at you to get off my shoulders you have just..." he cries out in anger, "taken. You've taken it."

"Peter," Tony says weakly, just wanting the kid to stop. To stop beating himself up. To stop describing Tony like he was the good person and Peter was the poison.

"And then you've carried me too!" Peter said, on the verge of tears. "And after all of that I still- Telling you that it was your fault..." he shakes his head, "I didn't mean it. I was just so angry- and there's no excuse. That was a weight I never should have been pressed on you, not with everything you've already done to help me, to make it easier. I knew where it would hurt and I aimed for that spot because that's what I had been used to doing. So many people had hurt me and for a second I was just so pissed at you for walking out and all that anger just came back and I just dug the knife in-"

"Peter stop," Tony says weakly, scared of the anger that the kid was internalizing that would only haunt him later.

"No, no!" Peter yells, suddenly his eyes flashing. Tony actually jumps and Peter's expression breaks as he points at him with gritted teeth. "That was a cheap shot. That was a stab in the back and you- Tony, you still caught me from behind and I- just, please," he whispers. "Know it wasn't your fault."

Tony never really faltered when Peter was yelling at him. It was the deceleration that got him. The complete turn around as Peter went from straight yelling to the most broken sixteen year old in the entire world.

"Ok, kid," Tony says weakly, because he could never argue with Peter when he got that look in his eyes. There was a lot he would do for this kid.

Peter nodded, satisfied, before he added, "And you need to know that you are the best person, the only person-"

"No." He wouldn't do that.

It was simple. It was short. And Tony was not changing his mind.

Peter stopped and stared at him, shaking his head, "Tony, come on-"

"No," Tony repeated. "Look, Pete, you can't get me to admit I'm something I'm not. I'm not gonna tell you I'm a good person, because I'm not. Or a good father. You shouldn't want me to be...I am the last person-"

"Maybe on your list, but on my list you're front and center," Peter says angrily, his eyes flashing.

Tony smirks, "That's great, that's really great. And do you know why that is, Peter? Because you've never been able to accept the fact that you're not safe with me. You only see the good in me, you either ignore the bad or you have trained yourself not to see it. And I am not saying we are weaker together," he says firmly, not making that mistake again because there was nothing he regretted more in his entire life. "And after what happened you'll be lucky if you even get out of my sight." Peter smirked at that, lowering his gaze. "But I said it once, and I will say it a thousand times, if anyone here needs to take a moment and think about this, it's you."

"You think I don't have a dark past?" Peter demands. "Everyone in my family is gone. I'm wondering why you even want to risk it with my track record?"

"You want to go over my track record then? I've killed close to three hundred and fifty people, kid," Tony snarls. "If you want to talk aliens, that's close to a hundred thousand. And I'm the full package, I have a lot of extra crap. Are you ready to deal with the press that will say you're my son and start a rumor that I'm giving you Stark Industries once I die, which I was going to anyway? Are you ready to deal with the crap that goes on in my life, like how I don't take care of myself because I am messed up? The not eating, the not sleeping, the nightmares, the panic attacks. All because of Afghanistan, New York, Sokovia...I got screwed up kid, it's a wonder Pepper hasn't left. And I've tried hard to shield you from that, I really have."

"And maybe it's time to let the wall down," Peter says quietly, moving slightly closer, unphased. "Because I'm also ready for more all nighters in the labs working on suits. I'm also ready to go get cheeseburgers and eat them on top of the Empire State Building again, I'm also ready to get into more fights and risk my life for you just like you would for me. I'm ready for pancakes in the morning with the Avengers, and you helping me with my chemistry homework. I'm even ready for when you yell at me because I did something dangerous because it shows you care about me. With every scenario you think of Tony, I can counter it. With every reason, I will give you another, because you are too hard on yourself and sometimes I am the only person giving you the faith, trust, admiration, and love that you deserve. So let me try and help."

Tony stared at him with such love and ruffled his hair quickly, recoiling his hand like he was afraid he might hurt him, "Pete, you're proving my point. You're a good kid. You don't deserve to be sucked into this mess, into this much dark. There's too much red, there's too much blood on my hands, so much that even Damian recognized it. You're asking to be apart of that. Because you want to try and help. And I love you for wanting to help. You are asking to deal with me when I go into another worm hole with a nuclear bomb and debate on letting go, you're asking to deal with me when I say I don't know if I'm coming home-

"I'll make sure you come home," Peter insisted.

"Peter, you can't fix me," Tony said furiously. "I know you want to, but you can't!"

"Let me try!" the kid splutters, his bangs plastered to his forehead but his eyes are bright as ever, innocent, but scarred for life. He shakes his head with a loud laugh, "You're not even thinking about the possibility that this is a good thing-

"Of course it's a good thing!" Tony shoots back in exasperation. "Peter, you've been like a son to me for the past two years," he cried out.

"And you are the closest thing I've had to a father, okay? So we're on the same page here! But i won't be able to convince you that I'm poison, just like you won't convince me that you're poison. And I'm not expecting you to be perfect-" Peter scoffs loudly, his voice rising with the pounding of the rain.

"I'm not!" Tony yelled.

"Good, cause neither am I! Look at that! Look at us!" Peter exclaimed, spreading his arm in the middle of the pouring rain. Silence. It's coming down in buckets. They can barely see each other two feet away. There are many emotions flying around, weaving through each drop that splatters against the thin line of rain on the pavement. Peter's breathing hard and he asks, "Do you want this?"

There's no hesitation. Not even one drop hits the ground after he asks it, and it's raining harder than either of them have seen in their life, the storm coming closer.

Tony looks up at him with a broken expression and whispers, "Yes." He had never said anything with the confidence he had just had. No hesitation.

Drenched from head to toe, with dark hair plastered against their foreheads they lock eyes.

"Me too," Peter says quietly.

And that was all it was.

A yes.

An agreement.

After everything that was what it came down to. In a way, that was them. After everything they had been through, every glare, every curse, every sentence they hadn't meant, it all came down to something very simple.

Tony gives him a small smile and then thunder claps and they both jump. Right, the storm. Tony's life had just changed and he had forgotten about it. He didn't remember the last time he had forgotten about the rain, not since Afghanistan.

"We should..." Peter points forward in the direction of the door but makes no move towards it.

Tony nods, running a hand over his face, flicking off water which does no good since it continues to drench him. "Yeah," he agrees, clearing his throat, trying to find words that fill the silence. There was no need to delay on what was said. It was done. Confirmed. He added, "The rain's also screwing up our casts."

"Yeah," Peter smirked.

"And we should get out of here before I get struck by lighting," Tony admitted, looking at the sky nervously as the storm continued to roll in.

"What about me?" Peter demands.

"You're short. Taller objects get hit first," Tony shrugs with a look of innocence. Peter scowls and Tony's gaze shifts to the lone jacket in a drenched heap on the roof. "You dropped my coat," he gasped, teasing the kid as he picked it up off the ground. He hadn't even seen it fall off but it was dripping wet now, which was a clear telling of the current weather. He flings it over his shoulder and winks at Peter.

Then he turns, figuring the boy will follow but the kid can't move. Peter opens his mouth to speak and suddenly can't do that either, his eyes going wide in shock before his vision suddenly blurs from tears. A sob builds in his throat, a knot in his stomach. His knees threaten to buckle and his

lungs burn and tighten, his heartbeat going faster. His hands begin to shake. He looks up in terror as his face screws up into a look of utter....nothing. Everything came crashing down in that instant and Peter was the only thing stopping the dam from breaking. He needed a couple seconds until Tony noticed. Less than a couple seconds. Other people would have walked on.

Tony was not other people.

The man had his back turned but he still stops, not even six feet away, his head popping up, alert. He turns around, sensing something is very wrong. He sees Peter's expression and can clearly tell tears are streaming down his cheeks. He straightens in shock, worry creasing his brow. "Pete," he whispers in question.

Peter opens his mouth and chokes out, "Tony-" and then he starts to sink.

Tony drops the coat without a thought and rushes to close the distance between them. Ignoring the pain in his leg he catches Peter as the kid collapses forward into his arms, sinking into his chest. It jars his bullet wound but Tony can barely feel it. He just curls an arm around him and tries to look at the teen. The boy's fist clenches around his back and the kid buries his head into his shoulder. Tony squeezes him gently and mutters, "Kid?"

He can barely hear Peter's voice.

"It *hurts*."

Tony's eyes open wide.

Oh God.

It's a confession.

It's pain.

He's admitting.

He letting the wall break.

Oh.

God.

His voice, Tony realizes with an awful expression. It's young and innocent and pure and it should not *sound* like that.

Tony clasps him hard around the back and holds him tight, squeezing his good shoulder all while cursing his broken arm as he supports his kid with his good one. The boy's fist is curled around his shirt and Peter's crying into his shoulder. They collapse into each other as best they can with two casts and Tony's cheek presses tight against the boy's wet curls as he tightens his grip, blinking rapidly to clear the stinging.

"I miss h-her," Peter sobs, Tony sheltering him from the rain as he wraps himself around the shaking kid. "I *miss* May," Peter shudders. The pain of May's death hit him hard, like a tidal wave, washing over him and carrying away any strength he had left. Peter felt something break inside him, something else mending as Tony held him tighter, trying to battle the pain and sadness Peter was currently drowning in. He was the only thing holding him above water because Peter had used up all his energy trying to keep himself above the surface for the past few days....he was done.

Tony was not. And Tony would carry him.

"I know, Pete," Tony croaks out, his voice cracking with emotion. Peter goes limp in his arms and Tony slowly lowers him to the ground, sinking down onto the wet concrete. Peter doesn't complain, he just cries, leaning hard into Tony like he was his anchor. Which he was.

"T-tony," Peter whispers, his eye shut tight, rain spilling over them, tears escaping out of them. It's a plea. It means so many things, and Tony understands every single one.

"Right here," he assures him brokenly, pulling the kid closer to his chest as Peter's fist curls tighter around his shirt, his entire body shaking. "Not going anywhere. Let it out kid."

"She's g-gone," Peter says softly. No...he asks. It's a question. Once again, he only trusts Tony, even though he's the one who heard it on the phone.

"Yes," Tony whispers, his heart being suddenly twisted by a cruel and ruthless fist. "Peter, I am so so sorry."

There's a moment of silence and Tony doesn't fill it, he just squeezes his eyes tighter and tighter at every sob Peter lets out. He can feel the pain in his own chest with every sound of pain the kid makes. It's torture, almost worse than anything he had ever been through, maybe worse, because Tony was here, and there was nothing he could do to ease the pain. Peter was here, in his arms, and he couldn't make it stop. He couldn't stop any bleeding, he couldn't tackle and punch the man who was hurting his kid. Peter was just in pain and Tony was helpless.

"I miss her," Peter says loudly, his voice trembling as he sniffs and then coughs, spluttering, "I can't- I don't know what's gonna happen- what I'm gonna do-" Tony can feel his heart beating out of his chest as he curls his fist harder around Tony's shirt.

"We'll figure it out," Tony promises him with a sad voice. "We always do. We'll just figure it out. We'll figure it out, kid. I promise."

It's not much of a promise. But it stalls the crying for about one minute, and Tony doesn't know what else to say.

"She's gone," Peter whispers as he comes to terms with it, breaking the ugly and horrific silence. Tony can feel the realization kicking in through Peter's touch alone, the tense as he resorts to anger and then the relaxation of his fists as it lapses into sadness. "She's gone," Peter repeats, more firmly this time like he's trying to resolve it in two words. He knows he can't, but he wishes he could if that would mean the pain goes away. And God, Tony wishes he could take the pain away.

"I've lost her," Peter says blankly. His voice doesn't shake on that one. It's dead. It's tired. It's sad. It's empty. "I lost her, and Ben, and my parents."

Tony doesn't know what to say to that because there is nothing to say to that. Crap, what does he say to make this better-

"I can't lose you," Peter says furiously, curling tighter around him.

Tony reaches in half shock at Peter's choice of words and clasps a hand to the back of his head, rubbing a hand through his wet and messy curls. He can promise him one thing, and he does as he hugs him tighter, his voice coming out dead serious, "You won't. I promise you that, Peter. You will not lose me."

Peter's entire body tenses and then shakes as he lets out a sob, his jaw tensing against Tony's

shoulder. As a response Tony shakes his head, a tear trickling down his cheek at how strong the kid is attempting to be. "Don't," he shakes his head, rubbing Peter's curls. Don't hold it in, he thinks. Don't be strong for me. Don't think you need to be strong. Don't think asking for help is weak. Don't think asking for a shoulder to cry on is wrong. "Don't," he says again, quieter this time, and Peter understands.

And then he obeys.

The kid falls limp against his shoulder and Tony wraps his arm tighter around him, closing his eyes as Peter cries, and the rain continues to pour. It takes about a good four minutes before the kid talks again through his tears.

"It- it w-wasn't-" Peter stutters as he clings to him. Oh God, Peter, stop.

"Pete," Tony says sharply, through his tears as well. He holds the kid tighter and that was the end of that. After everything, Peter still wanted to make sure Tony didn't take the blame for what had happened. Still trying to protect him.

"I'm s-sorry," Peter whispered.

No, don't apologize, Tony thinks. He curses himself for being so careless, speaking without thinking and making the kid feel worse just because he didn't want a reminder of the guilt that Peter had attempted to strip from him. Was he that selfish? Yet his name was on the will because May clearly thought he had what it took to be a father to Peter.

"I thought we agree no more apologies," Tony says quietly, carding through Peter's hair as he holds him protectively, apologizing in silence if he came across harsh.

"Oh- oh-kay," Peter makes out, his head growing heavy against Tony's shoulder. The boy shudders as he takes another shaky breath, Tony leaning his cheek atop Peter's mess of hair.

"It h-hurts, Tony," Peter cries out weakly, squirming as if in physical pain which he probably was. Crying three months of tears, the dam breaking by the flood of emotions that had been triggered by what happened this past weekend. Peter grits his teeth and literally groans in utter agony, "It hurts *s-so m-much...*" He almost had never heard the kid in more pain, a feeling someone should never have to go through.

Hearing Peter admit it hurt made Tony's eyes squeeze so hard he got a headache. He pulls the kid closer and his voice trembles, "I know, I know kiddo."

The rain pours down, but neither care. Tony just answers all of Peter's questions and lets him cry into his shoulder. The thunder rests at a low rumble and the rain splashes against the ground. It's fitting- the rain. And now there's not much else to say. Most of it is blatantly obvious.

Tony holds him tighter as he realizes there was no special moment, there was no climactic event that led to this. It was simply a look they exchanged the minute he turned around and saw the kid had finally broken. A look that said, I am about to shatter in front of you, and you are my anchor. I need you. I trust you. You need to help me pick up the pieces. Please.

Tony knew it was going to happen, the day they both broke and had this moment. He hadn't pictured it like this, but now he couldn't see it any other way. It was a brief second of vulnerability. Peter was the one who fell, knowing that Tony would catch him. Tony was the one who moved forward, knowing Peter would fall into his arms. It was a simple act of trust, of healing, of love, of pain. In a storm. On the roof. Nothing else. The simplicity of it all was meaningful and Tony

wouldn't trade where he was for anything in the world.

Three months of pain, and they're finally where they need to be, just for the worst reasons. That just made Tony hold him tighter.

"Tony, I-" Peter cries, sucking in a breath as tears stream down his face, his eyes squeezed shut.

"I know," Tony assures him quickly.

Nothing more needed to be explained, or justified, or said just so the other would understand.

What that exchange meant was between them, and only them.

But it was heard loud and clear.

Tony holds his kid, *his* kid, while he cries, and he doesn't dare move. Tears stream down his face as well as he hugs Peter, never loosening his grip. The rain pours down, but neither notices.

They get back inside later, how later they don't know. Tony's arm is around him as they walk into the elevator, dripping wet. Neither has spoken in a while. They didn't know what else to say. How do you continue from something as monumental as that? How's the weather? They were just in it for over an hour. Rain still dripped off their bangs, dark hair plastered to their faces, their shoes squishing as they walked in unison down one flight of stairs, Peter helping Tony despite him being the one under his arm.

An unspoken agreement had occurred earlier where they both just broke apart from the hug, when Peter could breathe normally again and had begun to get dehydrated. Tony gave him one last meaningful tight hug as he clasped the back of his head and ruffled his hair before he pulled away. Peter's eyes widened and he scrambled to curl his fist in Tony's jacket, his eyes going wide. Muttering assurance, Tony put his arm around him and the kid eased, and that arm had yet to fall off his shoulders. Peter had yet to talk, and Tony was almost worried if he had forgotten how to. He had stopped talking a ways in, and just cried against Tony's shoulder as the man held him in silence.

Now, they made their way inside, grateful for the warmer temperature and both shivered, making the decision to go downstairs and get out of their soaked outfits. Funny enough, they hadn't run into a single person which was usually impossible despite the size of the compound. Tony had gotten a few texts on the phone he was right to leave inside when going out to get Peter, the top one from Steve saying they had taken care of everything else and had all the details.

Once they found some extra clothes in the Med bay where they had extra clothes, they reemerged in dry sweatshirts and sweats, hair still sopping wet.

Then Tony nodded his head to the hallway. He didn't speak. He just asked Peter to follow.

Peter's brow furrowed but he walked after him and soon figured out where they were going. His heart clenched but he took a deep breath and moved closer to Tony who slipped an arm around his shoulder. They stopped at the front of the lab and stared in, and that's when Peter saw Tony's hand was shaking. Peter put aside his own fear and anxiety and urged him forward and together they walked down the steps.

Peter turned and looked around the room, his gaze falling on the overturned chair and the 3D screen that was crumpled against the wall. He remembered the emotions that he felt here, him

toppling that chair and Tony shoving the 3D screen. He remembered throwing a punch at Tony and screaming at him in pain, Tony's eyes expressing the exact opposite of what was coming out of his mouth. He remembered the desperation and the utter disbelief. Pain so great that Peter was speechless when Tony had walked out the doors they had just entered in.

And Tony hadn't changed a thing. He hadn't even been in here. Everything was how Peter remembered it. Except one addition: there was also a glass and a bottle on the lab counter on the side.

Peter looked sideways. Tony's gaze was fierce and the man stayed silent, his eyes glossy with tears. They both had memories of this place. Peter thought he would never be back here. It was an odd feeling as he looked around, remembering how much he had hated, and still partly did hate, the place he had once loved so much. Why was he letting so many good memories be ruined by one bad? A memory that had been fixed, repaired beyond belief.

After a second more, he ducked out from under Tony's arm and walked over to the chair that was on it's side on the floor. Hand shaking, he reached out, clasp the edge of it and lifting. The chair creaked, the rolling balls spinning as he moved it, the sound of plastic resonating through the silent room. With a pounding heart, shoving back flashbacks that made him flinch, he pushed it back into it's spot. A wave of relief washed over him silencing the screaming that he remembered like it was yesterday, the pain and fire that was building in his chest suddenly dying down. Peter took a deep breath and looked at Tony, motioning towards the 3D screen.

Tony nodded and stared at it, walking over slowly, his shoes squeaking against the ground. Tony's thumb trailed along the side as he made his way over to where it was bent. He tugged at it, loosening it from where it was lodged in the wall with a loud crack before he pulled it back to the center of the room with a slow walk. It groaned as it moved and Tony flicked it, the screen blinking on with a low hum that filled the silence, empty of noise. Tony stared at it for a second, his hand slowly unclenching before he turned to look at Peter.

They stayed silent. Words didn't need to be said, and Peter was fine with no talking. His voice would crack if he did anyway.

Peter watched Tony cross the room and grab the bottle and glass sitting on the counter, picking them both up awkwardly in his arms. They clinked loudly against his cast, the glass rubbing. He then stopped over by the sink and set both down. Without another word he poured the contents of the bottle down the drain, looking at it intently as it spilled out loudly, splattering against the sink. Tony flicked his wrist, shaking out the last drop before returning it to the counter, the bottom making a loud sound of contact as he straightened it aimlessly. Then, shaking his head as if to jar himself, Tony tossed it into the recycling bin, before shrugging and throwing the expensive looking glass in there too, because they both knew he would never use it again if he kept it.

He finally turned back to Peter who was had a small smile on his face, eyes red from crying, hair still a mess and dripping wet. A look was shared between the two of them. Peter looked over at the table and grabbed a screwdriver, tossing it to Tony who caught it without tearing his gaze from the kid's.

Peter pulled open the drawer of parts that Tony shoved in there when they weren't working. He always replaced it later, but this was the same batch that had been safely stored three months ago. The intent was there. Let's fix something, Peter said with his eyes.

Tony walked over and took his spot next to him as Peter handed him a gauntlet before taking a booster for himself. They worked for a couple minutes in silence, happy and content smiles on their faces, eyes focused and narrowed in concentration. Then, Tony, without taking his eyes off

his work, reached and clasped the kid's head, planting a kiss on the top of his wet mop of curls.

And then they went back to silence.

You didn't need to tell someone that you would die for them if they already watched you take a bullet or a knife for them.

Or that they were the one person keeping you sane, keeping you...human, if they were your anchor as well, if they hugged you in the middle of a storm and didn't leave your side.

You didn't need to tell someone that you were sorry if you could say it through a gaze.

Because you didn't need to tell someone that you loved them if they already knew.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guysssss <3 I really hope you enjoyed, please, please, please leave a comment down below I love hearing from you yall are awesome and I have gotten so many good ideas from you guys!!!

So this chapterrrrrr 90% of it was the talk so I hope you liked that and then there was really no dialogue or anything for the last 1 k words lol. But a lot of stuff happened, we finally got the huggggg (writing that made me so happy haha it took them long enough lol) AND irondad is officially officially a thing, not that it hasnt been for the past like always XD but hes gonna adopt Peter!!!

And Peter finally broke poor guy <3 he needs a break. I should give him one shouldn't i?

Anyway thank you guys so much for reading, MUCH more to come, I sincerely hope you enjoy and thank you for all your support. Coffee time, stay healthy, happy, and safe everyone <3 u guys. Oh one more thinggggg:

PLEASE READ!!!!

Okay sooooooooo the reason why this was actually on time lol is because I am leaving to go on vacation and wont be back for a week. So expect **ONE MORE CHAPTER ON FRIDAY BEFORE I LEAVE**, and then I will post abouttttt a week and a couple days after when I get back. I know I said 3 chapters left but yall have been leaving some super awesome ideas so I'm not gonna give an estimate XD it's gonna be more than 3 chapters I can tell ya that. So stay tuned for next chapter and then we're gonna take a llllll hiatus :(and ofc it will have a cliff hanger ending because I'm super nice like that. :)

Love you all 3000 <3 <3

It's Easy To Sail When The Water's Not Choppy

Chapter Summary

Thank you to Rachel for the chapter name :)

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely readersssssss

Can I say first off that I love all of you? One of the reasons being I thought I was going a little heavy on the angst and was like yay gonna be happy now (besides the cliffhangers which I sincerely hope you all dont kill me for and enjoy) and then yall were like: HERE U GO HERE ARE ANGST IDEAS TAKE THEM and I was likeOK! I am HERE FOR IT?!?!? It's so funny. Also you guys are the best- that too lol. Soooo as this is the last chapter for a little bit, I hope i did all of your inputs justice <3 This is a crazy chapter....I have not checked the word count but its def over 10k so lolllll and there's a little and a lot all at once. But we are starting to ramp up again, and as we do, Peter and Tony are becoming more like father and son by the day <3 gotta love those two.

Once again, thank you all for reading it's insane how much support this story has gotten with hits and kudos and comments. you guys are the absolute best and i appreciate all of your support, i cannot express that enough.

Writing this chap was a blastttt and i hope you enjoy!!! Before I spoil the two cliffhangers because these boys never get a break in this hypehouse, read on awesome people!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Peter," Tony insisted.

"No, I'm fine, I just-" Peter sneezed again, rubbing his nose. They were still in the lab, tinkering away in silence, but the kid wasn't looking too good. He was still shivering every couple of minutes but had declined Tony's persistent words that they should stop working. He had finally had enough after the fourth sneeze came from the kid.

Tony reached out and clasped his shoulder, "Come on. Med bay."

"I'm fine, just allergies," he muttered, his nose red, eyes bloodshot with dark bags under his eyes. The kid hadn't slept, Tony knew that, but neither of them had the intent to.

Tony gave him a knowing look, "Allergies? Unless you're allergic to me there's nothing you could be allergic too. Peter, you were out in the pouring rain, you're probably starting to catch a cold."

"I'm Spiderman, I don't catch colds," Peter says angrily, frustration clear in the way he was twisting the screwdriver into the gauntlet he had been fixing. Tony narrowed his eyes and reached up, clasping a hand on the kid's forehead. Peter swatted him away, ducking, "Dang, you turned into a dad quick."

"You have a fever," Tony said angrily.

"So?" Peter scoffed. "What if I'm just hot?"

"You're sick," Tony scowled.

The kid rolled his eyes and ignored him. Instead he moved to the side and turned the dial on the 3D screen, effortlessly getting back into old habits in a comfortable manner which Tony loved to see, but he didn't want the kid to be miserable. He wouldn't mind staying here and working on the suits all night, but he knew neither of them were up to it, and Peter at least needed to take a tylenol to get his fever down. Peter, who knew without even turning around that Tony was staring at him with concern, repeated, "No. I'm fine."

Tony cursed because he knew there was no way to get Peter to the med lab because the kid would never admit that he could be getting sick, even if he was. Peter's immune system was much better than a normal human's, which meant if they nipped this in the bud, it was possible he could get over it in a day. But Peter was the literal son of Tony Stark. His ego was climbing every day. So Tony did the only thing he could. He muttered, "Okay then, well I'm going to the med bay." He turned around and started walking for the door very slowly and announced, "I need to change my bandages and make sure I didn't catch an infection."

Peter stopped working, putting down the screwdriver. It was a battle, knowing that Tony did this on purpose but also concerned for his health, while also dealing with his own stubbornness. He called back, "Ok, I'm not coming." Obviously the kid knew exactly what Tony was up to. Get him to be worried about him, so that he would go down to the med bay with him, and once he was there, Tony would be able to convince him to take something and maybe get another layer of clothing since he was shaking.

Tony grinned over his shoulder, "Yes you are."

Peter cursed, "Yes I am." Then he sneezed. Tony made a face, about to say something and Peter pointed at him, "Shut up."

"I didn't say anything," Tony grinned, getting a small shove from the kid.

Peter followed the man out the door and they walked slowly to the med lab, Peter noticing every wince that showed on Tony's face. When they finally reached it, Tony leaned against one of the beds, taking a break, which gave Peter time to grab what he needed to redo his bandages.

"Kid, no, I got it-" Tony muttered quietly, but even then he was easing himself into the seat with a wince, exhausted. He had needed to go to the med lab, because he had not been doing too well for the past couple hours, ever since the rain.

"I got it," Peter corrected, setting all of the materials down on the bedside table. "It's my fault anyway," he muttered.

"Shut up, Pete," Tony winced as he closed his eyes with pain. Even if his voice was small because Tony obviously didn't want it to crack, it was still firm.

Peter held back his words at Tony's pain, but the guilt remained. Tony's bullet wound was jarred during that entire conversation, mostly from the hug that they had shared and not talked about since. He had also made him walk up the stairs to the roof- how could he be so selfish?

Peter walked over in silence and cautiously felt for the side of the wet bandage. He slowly peeled it back and winced as Tony hissed in pain, the man pressing his head into the pillow, knuckles white

from gripping the rail on the side of the bed. Peter cursed himself then and there. God, why did he let him say yes? Again, he was selfish. He let the blood red bandage rest to the side as Tony's chest rose and fell quickly. Then he frowned at the sight of the wound which was not looking good. Grabbing more alcohol to clean it, he looked at the man nervously, realizing he was just going to cause him more pain. "This is gonna sting," he said quietly, as if this hasn't been causing Tony extreme agony for the past couple days. Again, because of him. The pain meant for him.

"No crap," Tony hissed, his eye squeezed shut.

Peter worked quickly, his eyes narrowed as he cleaned out the wound, Tony gripping the sides of the bed as he tried not to arch his back in pain. The skin around the entrance wound was red and raised, darkening to almost black towards the center. Dry blood molded around the stitches that just irritated the skin and made for a sickly green color. Peter had never been one to be grossed out, that was not the reason for his face of discomfort. The face was because of who was being hurt because of him, who had took the bullet in the first place, and who had come to find him in the rain on the roof, and Peter hadn't thought twice as he hurt him even more.

"You're doing fine, kid, I'm okay," Tony said through gritted teeth.

Peter looked up at him thankfully because of course Tony knew what was bothering him. The man was simply telling him it wasn't his fault and that Peter wasn't hurting him, despite the very obvious wincing whenever he pressed too hard. It took a couple minutes but he had re-banded the wound and wrapped an ace bandage around it for good measure. It could still get infected, he wouldn't be able to know as of now, but it was all he could do. Peter had gotten pretty good with bandaging himself up from all of his patrols, so that May wouldn't see and so he could hide it under his shirts and sweatshirts. But Tony wasn't him, he thought angrily; the man didn't have a healing factor. Again, he was being selfish. What was left was to just wait, which he hated. His hands were covered in blood and Peter stepped back, trying to stop them from shaking.

Tony blinked and looked down, "How'd you get so good at that?"

"Practice," Peter said simply. Then he added lowly, "Especially over the past three months." He would admit later that he had been careless, reckless, and impulsive during his fights because he hadn't cared about getting hurt anymore. But that was for another time; he really didn't want to talk about that now. He rubbed his nose to stop a rising sneeze.

"Ah," Tony said plainly, understanding that now was not the time to get into that. Not with the look on Peter's face. He glanced up at Tony and then wordlessly went to the sink, rubbing the blood off with trembling fingers.

"Thank you, doctor," Tony drawled to lighten the situation, admiring the job well done as he yanked his shirt down and let out a sigh of relief, head digging into the pillow behind him.

"How bad does it hurt?" Peter asked on an understood scale of 1-10 as he wiped his hands, trying desperately to keep his voice level.

"One," Tony lied, opening one eye to look at the kid. He grinned and shook his head, "I'm fine Pete, don't worry about me."

"Going out there in the rain could have given you an infection," Peter grumbled, glaring at him with no anger, because that was a thing they had been learning how to do again. "You shouldn't have done that."

Tony shrugged like he didn't have a care in the world, "I wasn't going to leave you out there."

"I was fine," Peter lied.

Tony gave him a look and scoffed, "Yeah, okay."

"You hurt your leg going up those stairs and going outside in the pouring rain in your condition was not a good call either," Peter said firmly. "You could catch a cold, which would really screw you up."

"Who's the one with cold?" Tony asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I don't have a-" Peter sneezed and Tony shot him a look as the kid finished his sentence, grumbling, "Cold. Whatever. You shouldn't even have the bullet wound in the first place," the boy mumbled, turning away.

"Yeah, maybe Damian would have missed," Tony nodded. Peter gave him a look which made Tony stop sarcastically and gasp in mock surprise. He drawled, "Oh, you meant let it hit you?" His face fell and he winked, "Yeah, not a chance, kid. Get over yourself." Then he waved his hand as he sat up, "And it's your turn now, sniffles."

Peter made a face during that whole sentence and lastly said, "Don't call me that." He fought the urge to scratch his nose right then in there so he didn't sneeze again. Tony started to get up and Peter pressed a hand on his shoulder, easing him back down, "Just...tell me what to get and I'll get it. Sit there for a while, okay?" he said softly. The look in his eyes was enough to make the man listen.

Tony nodded and pointed him in the direction of the cold suckers they had, the immune system pills, as well as a Tylenol for Peter's fever which was low. Once Peter had been treated, Tony slid off the bed, wincing at the pain in his bad leg. Peter was at his side immediately and he gave him a firm nod, "Okay, no more lab for tonight. Movie time."

"Star Wars?" Peter said hopefully, surprised at how timid his voice was.

Tony's face reflected exactly how Peter felt and he nodded, "Sure thing kiddo. With you warm in a blanket and tea, coffee for me, and popcorn." He scratches his head, "Is popcorn okay to have with a cold?"

"We're gonna make it anyway," Peter grinned.

Tony smirked and put his arm around him, "True."

A couple hours later, 'Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back' credits played, the blue words bright against the dark screen of space. The clock read 5:08 in red numbers. Peter stifled a yawn, sprawled across the couch opposite Tony, each facing different ways with their backs against the sides. Peter had a blanket over him and was much warmer, tissues at the ready as his nose tingled. Tony had his coffee by his side and was propped up against the arm, pillows used to support the wound in his chest. A huge bowl of popcorn was in the middle of them, made when they snuck into the kitchen. The entire compound was asleep, and they were falling back into an old habit, watching Star Wars.

Peter rubbed his face and frowned as Tony clicked through the credits. The man turned to him, "How are you feeling?"

Peter shrugged. His fever had gone down, and he was defiantly warm, no longer shivering like he had in the lab. It was the first time he had been warm in the entire day. His nose was still itchy but he said, "Better." Tony gave him a wary look but took his word for it, knowing that Peter had

understood the seriousness in his tone and would have answered truthfully if something was sincerely wrong. Then Peter said randomly, "Hey, I'm sorry for punching you, by the way." He had no idea where it came from, his only theory being the continuation of making amends with the person he needed most in the world. If he thought of something wrong he would address it. No more secrets. No more grudges.

Tony swallowed, chugging the last of his second cup of coffee as he spoke slowly, "Uh, you already apologized for punching me."

"No," Peter shook his head, feeling slightly sleep deprived. His eyes were heavy but he wasn't about to fall asleep, not before he made this apology for willingly hitting the man in the face, despite circumstances supporting it, and not today. He said, "No, I apologized for the one before and then the one after."

"Yeah," Tony nodded, blinking in confusion before he asked, "That's it?"

"No, I punched you while I tried to make it look like I was beating you up," Peter pointed out, remembering the look on Tony's face when he slammed him against the wall.

"You were beating me up," Tony mumbled in amusement, showing Peter he was kidding with a wink.

Peter nodded, a small smile curling on his lip, not disagreeing, "Yeah, I was. Sorry about that. I think that was it though?"

Tony shrugged, arching his back as he cracked it, squinting at how long they had left of the credits, "You tell me."

Peter scoffed as he settled down in his blanket, sipping the last of his tea, "It's me punching you, shouldn't you remember- oh! Also when I punched you before I hid in that cabinet," he giggled.

Tony did not giggle. It was dark; all the lights were off as Tony's face fell and he tensed, his hand curling into a fist as he sucked in a breath.

"I punch you a lot, I'm sorry, I'll try and stop," the kid chuckled. Peter had leaned over the side of the couch to grab his energy drink, probably his seventh one- that meant he did not see the look on the man's face. The look that clearly said he thought Peter had left him for dead, that he had abandoned him, that he had been ready to let Tony die, no questions asked. The look that almost rivaled the mention of waterboarding. It was fear, it was horror, it was discomfort, because something in him still didn't sit right.

When Peter's gaze flicked back to him, it was gone, replaced with a smile that looked convincing enough. He would talk to him about it, when the time was right. This was not the time. "Yeah, well, you might need to punch me again to get me to wake up," Tony said with a forced laugh, taking another gulp of coffee and blinking hard. He grabbed the remote and wiggled his eyebrows, "Well we haven't done an originals marathon in forever," Tony grinned as he turned down the volume and looked at him in question. "You ready for Return of the Jedi?"

Peter scowled and threw a handful of popcorn at him, "*Am I ready* for Return of the Jedi?" he repeated with a scoff.

Tony tried to catch the kernels that Peter launched at him and shoved some in his mouth, shrugging, "Well I didn't know if you wanted to go to sleep..."

Peter gave him a knowing look and mumbled, "Tony, neither of us would get any rest." He was

right. Tony didn't even want to try; the only sleep he got was when he was medically knocked out by drugs and surgery. And Peter had gotten just as much sleep at the hospital when he was too tired to raise his head. Besides that, neither of them had slept despite the frequent requests made by teammates, and neither planned to.

For Peter, it was habit; part of him thinking he'd still hear the loud screeching sound if he closed his eyes. Then there was the pain, an amount he could control, but not ignore. And then there was May. Peter was haunted by the last time he saw her, the last hug they shared, and the last time he spoke to her on the phone. Flashbacks of the entire experience he and Tony went through would definitely stop him from sleeping for a while until he just collapsed from exhaustion. As selfish as it was, he hoped Tony would catch him when he physically dropped.

Tony on the other hand was facing the same things. There was the pain, about the same as Peter was going through in comparison, enough that he could control but not ignore- the bullet wound in particular. Then there was the flashbacks of Afghanistan which had gotten worse recently, dark memories that Tony had just securely locked away now seeping through once again. Memories of waterboarding with Damian, which he had yet to tell Peter about, and just the entire couple of days. Peter's scream was etched into his head and it wouldn't go away. As selfish as it was, he hoped the kid wouldn't fall asleep because truth was, he needed to just be there with him, making sure he was okay for the time being.

And then there was the fact that they had just agreed to something that would change both their lives. Tony was going to adopt Peter. They were going to solidify the bond that had been growing over the past two years. There was not going to be much change, except that a piece of paper said that they were who they already acted like, but that piece of paper had a massive effect.

"All nighter then," Tony grinned, thumbing the remote to hit the next button.

"Can I have coffee?" Peter asked with a smile.

"No."

Soon after that, the final credits of the Return of the Jedi played, with both of them nodding off every couple seconds towards the end. Determined to stay awake because of the daunting look in each other's eyes whenever they snapped their head up, they decided that it was already 7 and that people would be waking up soon because Avengers were early risers, that they should make pancakes.

They used to do that on the weekends, and figured, what the heck, why not do it today? They made more coffee and tea respectively, and Tony coaxed the kid into wearing a heavier sweatshirt while also adjusting the temperature of the downstairs level. The kid had stopped sneezing and his fever was gone, but Tony knew he wasn't 100% better, despite the teen's insisting. Now distracted and all thoughts of sickness gone, Tony and Peter moved in their old rhythm, the kid grabbing the ingredients from the cabinet and the pan, the older man reaching through the fridge and balancing what they needed on his cart. They gathered everything on the center island and Tony turned on some of his music out of habit. A familiar favorite, 'Shook Me All Night Long', by AC/DC, lofted through the kitchen. They both hummed along, singing the lyrics every few words.

"So do I call you dad now?" Peter asked him to break the comfortable silence with a goofy smile. He said it with a grin but there was underlying seriousness. Tony realized he had no idea how this was going to work. They had so much to figure out. So much to talk about.

Tony raised an eyebrow and turned to him, tossing him the spray for the pan that Peter had placed on the stove, "You can call me whatever you want, Pete. Just not Mr. Stark like you did when we

first met, God I hated that."

"You did?" Peter laughed.

Tony broke into a smile, nodding as he admitted, "Yeah, I was going to tell you but you finally switched to calling me Tony."

"Well, you're welcome," Peter snorted.

Tony grinned and then a second later he nudged the kid in his good shoulder and said, "But if you don't change my contact to dad, I'm disowning you."

If someone else heard that conversation they might have gasped, because maybe to others that was a rude thing to say at the worst time given the circumstances. But this was Tony and Peter. Their bond had strengthened ten fold over the last hour alone and they knew they never give each other up for any reason. Peter, knowing instantly that Tony was joking, and even taking it as a form of endearment, gave a small giggle- a truly happy giggle. Tony smirked, reaching and ruffling his hair.

Peter rubbed it down and frowned, "My hair's going back to being messy again."

"Get over it," Tony shrugged, tossing some flour on him. Peter rubbed it off his hair and scowled, waiting a tactical second before he scooted back and made his move. He pushed past Tony's hand in the bag and threw a handful at his face before the man could even see it coming. Tony stumbled back and coughed, a white billow of smoke falling from his cheeks. He brought up his arm, wiping the flour off as best he could. Tony blinked, "Thank you, so much, Pete."

Peter shrugged, already pouring some into a bowl, oblivious. "You started it," he pointed out. Tony rubbed his face with his sleeve, using water from the sink to speed up the process. Then Peter looked over his shoulder with a frown and asked, "Hey, another question. Do I change my name? Peter Stark? I mean...how does that work?"

Tony blinked flour out of his eyes and squinted, "Up to you, Pete." He didn't want to admit that it had a nice ring to it. Of course he liked it. But he also would respect if Peter wanted to keep his own name not only because it was easier for school, but because his last name was literally all he had left of his family. He didn't know if Peter wanted to give it up. Unsure if the look on Peter's face was due to curiosity or worry, he assured him, "We don't need to figure this all out now, you know."

"Yeah," Peter nodded thoughtfully. "What about the press? They're gonna have a field day."

"They've been having field days already," Tony snorted.

Peter looked up at him, nearly over pouring the milk which threatened to spill over the edge of the measuring cup, "Woah, what?"

"I've been paying people off for years," Tony laughed. "I'm Tony Stark, you really don't think people snap photos of me when I go out of the compound, especially when I'm walking with a sixteen year old kid who looks like me?"

"You think I look like you?" Peter asked with a grin, tossing Tony an egg to crack on the side of the bowl as he did one himself.

Tony caught it and Peter both did cracked them against the rim with difficulty, catching pieces of the shell at the last second. Tony sighed and muttered, "Side note, never crack eggs with a broken

arm."

"Hear hear," Peter agreed, taking the shells and tossing them in the garbage.

"But yeah," Tony continued. "I mean, not like...spitting image but you don't have blonde hair and green eyes or something. We look similar. Press sure thought so. They've been trying to leak rumors about you being my son for two years now. I've kept them at bay."

Peter's eyes widened in shock, a grin appearing on his face as he poured in the rest of the ingredients into the bowl and began mixing, "And what, you just threatened them?"

"Pretty much yeah," Tony agreed as he helped him. "My pockets are big and I can be pretty intimidating. None of the pictures got leaked but...it's gonna be harder now. So that part is up to you. If you want people to know," Tony explained seriously, putting out his hand, "Because I can make sure no one finds out if that's what you want." Peter blanched at that pressure and Tony tosses him a towel to wipe his hands. "We can figure that out later too, kid."

"Okay," Peter said thankfully. He then frowned as he wiped off the spoon and began to mix again, slower this time as he hesitantly asked in a voice that didn't even seem like his own, "I don't have to go to school tomorrow, do I?"

Tony gave a tiny smile and grabbed the chocolate chips, pouring them into the bowl, "No, kid, not if you don't want to."

"I don't want to," Peter muttered as he scraped the side of the bowl to get some flour. Then he sneezed, making a face at Tony who shot him a knowing look.

Tony went back to the previous topic, "Okay, so you take a couple days off. Or a week. As long as you need. I'll call your principal and let her know."

"Him," Peter corrected with a small smirk. Then he sneezed. Tony gave him a look and he waved it off, "You're gonna call my school?"

Tony stopped with the chocolate chips and frowned, looking up at him with a raised brow. Tony sighed and poured a few more in with a roll of his eyes before he nodded, "Yeah. Someone's got to explain where you've been for a week and a half."

"And what are you gonna say?" Peter asked incredulously.

"I'll tell him the truth," Tony shrugged. "You were kidnapped, are actually Spiderman and as of recently, the son of Tony Stark-" At Peter's look he smirked, "I'm kidding. Obviously I'll come up with something."

Peter scoffs and runs a hand through his hair, starting to pour pancakes onto the pan resting on the stove. They sizzle and Peter leaves the bowl to the side, leaning against the counter. He takes a deep breath and admits, "We haven't made these in forever. Did you keep-" he waves his hand, "Like I know you stopped cheeseburgers..."

Tony makes a face, "I made them once. Tasted like crap."

Peter grins and laughs out, "They're pancakes!" Then he sneezed, wincing and rubbing his nose.

"Yeah, and they tasted like crap!" Tony laughed, not wanting to go into detail of how wrong it felt making pancakes in the kitchen without the kid who he always did it with. No wonder they tasted like crap. He shot him a look at the sneeze and Peter put his hands up in surrender.

Peter looks down and rubs his chin as he flips two of them with a spatula, almost using that act as an excuse to avoid making eye contact with Tony as he mumbles, "Yeah, I- I didn't have them either."

Tony waited for more but none came. He blinked once. "I've confessed my heart out here about how I was a mess for three months, how about you?" he asked, crossing his arms as best as he could with a cast.

Peter turns incredulously, about to flip a pancake. His eyes go wide and there's amusement written all over his face as he scoffs, "You did not confess your heart out-"

"Come on, we had a full Meg Ryan chick flick in the pouring rain for gosh sakes," Tony snorted, trying to ease the tension that was enveloping the memory of what had happened a couple hours ago.

"And I now know you didn't eat cheeseburgers, I'm heartbroken," Peter drawled, making light of that situation as well. Slowly but surely they were getting back to normal.

"Harsh blow Pete," Tony gasped, putting a hand to his heart.

"That's hardly knowing your whole life story about how Tony Stark handled three months without his sidekick," Peter drawled, wiggling his eyebrows. A sneeze built up and he set down the spatula and doubled over into his elbow. "I'm fine," he muttered before Tony could say anything.

"So you admit you're my sidekick?" Tony marveled, trying to hide his smile, still stuck on that previous sentence, the one time he ignored the kid's waning sickness.

Peter turned with a glare, "I will launch a pancake at your face-"

"I see you two are getting along?" Tony and Peter turned around and saw Pepper enter, her red fiery hair tied up in a messy bun. She smiled at both of them, looking fondly at the pancakes. Her expression proved she was remembering all the times she had walked in and seen the two of them in the kitchen, and just like them, she was happy to see that again.

"Yeah," Peter smiled fondly. "I haven't punched him yet."

Pepper smirked and looked between the two of them. "So did you guys figure...it all out?" she asked slowly, raising an eyebrow. She and the Avengers had rightly given them space after Steve came back and told them all that Tony had gone to talk with Peter. They all had gone to bed confident the two would work it out, and they were right.

"Yeah," Tony said with a smile, exchanging a look with Peter.

"Well that's good," Pepper said with a forming grin, understanding the good news. "That's really really good. I get a hug," she announced. Tony began to walk forward but instead she went for Peter, wrapping her arms around him tightly. Peter hugs her back, closing his eyes and smiling into her shoulder.

"Thanks Pepp," he said quietly, and his voice breaks.

She rubbed his back and pulled away, thumbing his cheek affectionately before squeezing his good shoulder and speaking firmly, "I would say welcome to the family, but Peter, you've been apart of this family for a while."

"And we're still in the Meg Ryan chick flick," Tony announced from behind them, breaking the

moment.

Pepper sighed, patting Peter's shoulder as she went over to Tony, kissing him and frowning at his small peck he gave back, "Well then that's no way to treat your love interest."

Tony blinks, "I'd dip you but people seem to forgotten I have a broken arm. And a bullet wound. And a bum leg, in case any of you guys just forgot." Tony points to all of his injuries sarcastically.

"I'll put some Motrin on the table for you," Pepper rolled her eyes. "And Peter, I heard you sneeze, I'm making you tea."

"Thanks Pepp," Peter grinned.

Tony frowned, giving her another kiss as she walked past him, shaking his head, "Once again, something very wrong with giving a grown man Motrin."

"Tony, honey, can you help me with the chairs?" she responded with a light laugh.

The man looked around in shock and spluttered, "Once again, bullet wound, bad leg, broken arm- sure I'll help carry chairs."

Peter turned to him, "Well as you stated before you're crap at making pancakes, and I don't want mine tasting like crap. So you're on chair duty, I'm on flipping duty-" Peter reached for the spatula that Tony had grabbed from the counter.

"Find your own," Tony sniffed.

Peter rolled his eyes, "Are you a six year old?"

Tony nodded innocently and Peter sighed before he went to help Pepper with the chairs. They exchanged a look. "He's milking it," Peter decided.

"Definitely," she agreed affectionately.

"Who are the chairs for?" Peter asked slowly, realizing he had been doing a task and had no idea why. He didn't know why he asked it; he knew. It was just such a foreign action- event, rather, that Peter had forgotten. He had blocked it out, not because it was a bad memory, but because it was one of the few that hurt the most and he couldn't bear to think of it.

"Well unless you have some other superhero friends that we don't know about," Clint snorted, confirming Peter's thoughts as he walked in with bullseye pants, his hair spiky since he had just woken up.

"Nice pants, Hawkeye," Peter snorted, hiding his emotions that were rushing through him at the moment.

"Thank you," Clint sneered, but there was a smile behind the act of sarcasm. "Nice nose Rudolph."

Peter frowned, glaring at him and sniffing, "It's allergies."

Natasha came in after him and she yawned, giving Peter a wave as they slipped into their respected seats. The rest of the Avengers filed in after them, Steve winking at Peter who gave him a nod and smile. Everyone gave their hellos as if it was just another Saturday, and sat down, leaving Peter staring at a table full of a group of people he loved, a memory he thought would never repeat again yet a couple weeks ago. A little overwhelmed at all of this, Peter retreated to the stove where Tony

was, Pepper covering his absence by telling the Avengers to set the table, giving his shoulder a nudge. He thanked her silently and walked backward.

He shoved his hand into his pocket of his sweatpants and leaned against the counter next to Tony, looking over the counter to the table where his...family...was, all talking and laughing. Staring straight ahead silently, he wanted to say how weird it was to be doing something that they hadn't done in over three months. He wanted to express how his silence and apprehensiveness didn't mean he wasn't glad that this was all happening, because he was, more than he could express with words which was why he was not saying anything. He wanted to elaborate on why it was hard to breathe at the moment but was scared it would trigger a panic attack.

Instead he took one look at Tony who was watching him thoughtfully and at the first glance, the man immediately understood. Tony gave him an encouraging nod, his gaze flicking over to where the Avengers were seated and then back at Peter. There was reassurance in his gaze, as well as support, and Peter let his shoulders relax and he took a deep breath. Nothing else was needed, and in a way that was better than words. When their silent conversation was over, Peter cleared his throat. There was a lot he could have said, but instead he said:

"How many did you burn?" he asked, wincing as his voice cracked slightly at the end, seeing the tea Pepper had made steeping by the counter. How it had gotten there he had no idea.

Tony pretended not to notice, which he was thankful about and he started to count on his fingers before he gave up, "A couple. Not my fault though."

"No no, they definitely burned themselves," Peter muttered sarcastically as he peaked into the bowl they had set out that held over 50 pancakes. He ran his thumb along the side with a ghost of a smile as he remembered the cliché 'good old days'.

"You flip then, pancake master," Tony rolled his eyes and thrust the spatula into Peter's hands which shattered through his thoughts. Peter didn't mind though because Tony was spluttering, trying to cover up his blunder. "It's like, you check on one side and it's starting to get a little gold and then you wait not even two more seconds, check again, and it's burnt to a crisp!"

"Yeah, okay," Peter scoffed, flipping the last two and transferring them to the big container. Pepper came over and carried it to the table, knowing that they would have tried and probably failed with their casts. The other Avengers were already placing different flavored syrups in their respected areas on the table according to which teammates liked what- same with the drinks, big forks and little forks. It had been a while, but no one made a mistake, almost as if they had all been waiting for this day to happen again-

"Rhodey, you gave me a small fork," Sam grumbled.

Okay, one mistake.

"No, I did not, that's Buck's, open your eyes and look where your place mat is," Rhodey called back, shooting him a look.

"Oh," Sam rolled his eyes.

"Sorry Rhodey," Rhodey called in annoyance.

"Shut up."

No mistakes.

Everyone sat down and chowed down, the amount of pancakes enough to feed an army, barely enough to feed the Avengers. The first half of the breakfast, as usual, was calm. There were a couple jokes, a few good laughs, lots of smiles, and light conversations once they all got back into their tradition. And it felt good to be back. The second half, as usual, was more intense. There was louder laughing, better jokes, more smiles, and deeper conversations as they moved on to pressing matters and spoken truths.

"I'm glad we're all back here," Pepper admitted, the first one to formally announce the fact that they hadn't done this in three months.

"Still," Tony announced to everyone with a raised hand, "stuck in a Meg Ryan movie. I, for one, would like to get out."

"I have a feeling that's an inside joke, so I won't even go near that, but I will say I am also glad we're all back here doing this again," Steve said honestly, looking around at everyone. Then he motioned with his fork, sobering his tone, "And we can't leave this table until you guys fill us in," he added.

Tony shrugged, "There's nothing to really fill in, we just...figured it out."

"Good figure out or bad figure out?" Wanda asked, her eyes flicking between them.

"Bad," Peter sighed. The entire table tensed until they saw the smirk on Peter's face, "He can pull the dad card now." Thankfully he hadn't sneezed in a while because there was no doubt Tony would make him go to bed.

Everyone chuckled, smiles growing on their faces as they realized the good news and voiced their congrats. It was kind of surreal for them all, but at the same time it was like nothing had changed. But everything had changed. Tony ruffled Peter's hair with his good arm, getting clapped on the back by Rhodey who was sitting next to him. Steve grinned and clasped Peter's shoulder from his neighboring seat. "That's great, kid," he said genuinely, before gesturing around. "So are we all your Aunts and Uncles now?"

Tony choked and set down his glass of orange juice, "I'm serious. We can go watch a chick flick, I'm sure there's one out, there's always one out."

"You go, we'll stay here and talk to the kid," Rhodey shrugged, grinning around at the other Avengers who agreed with him.

Tony blinked and wiped his hands, gasping, "I'm unneeded here, I can sense that." Natasha gave a light chuckle and a wave as Tony pushed back his chair and got to his feet, "I'll take a hint." Peter understood it as a joke but still kept an eye on him until he was safely balanced and walking towards the kitchen, probably to get another bottle of Orange Juice.

"For someone who complains about being injured, he could have asked one of us to get the OJ," Clint mumbled, cleaning off the last of his plate.

"It's Tony, he doesn't ask for help," Natasha drawled with a roll of her eyes, popping a piece of pancake into her mouth with a spark in her eye.

"Hear hear," Pepper gave a tired smile, earning a laugh and a small hug from Wanda as they chuckled.

"So tell us what happened, kid," Sam said, turning the attention back to Peter who looked down and bit his lip.

Peter shrugged, "We just....we talked...and then we agreed that..." he nodded. "There's not much to say?"

"There's a whole bunch to say!" Bucky laughed in confusion. "Kid, this is really cool."

"Yeah," Peter said enthusiastically, before looking around as he twirled his fork on his plate like he would a screwdriver. Always fixing things, or at least trying to. This was another thing that needed fixing. Peter chooses his words slowly, "But I didn't need a piece of paper to tell me that you guys were my family. Or that Tony was like my..." he trails off and takes a deep breath. "We talked on the roof, and I told him that I understood why he did it."

A couple people straightened and Peter kept his gaze lowered as he muttered, "That was the second time I have told him that. The first time was when he took the bullet for me. I wanted nothing more than to get as far away from him as possible, so I couldn't hurt him."

The Avengers lowered their heads around the table but kept their eyes on Peter who was staring down at his hands in his lap. His voice was small, but loud enough that they could all hear, and firm enough that they knew he was not weak, but quite the opposite. "When I left that conference room I needed to get away from all of you because too many people have gotten hurt because of me. People I cared about. And I'm realizing that when Tony and I decided that we were gonna go through with this, I had never asked you to take that risk. Because you all are my family too. You've always been there for me, you're the ones I've turned to and relied on..." Peter smirks, his eyes stinging. "Not many highschoolers can say they're friends with the Avengers, can they?" he joked weakly before sobering his tone and losing his smile. It was then that he looked up, "But the point is, I understand why Tony did it now, which means I understand why you did it. I forgave him. And I forgive you."

Silence.

Vision is the one who breaks it. Peter had known him for a short while- the android was not a talkative one, but he had been a friend all the same. "Peter, you mentioned that we were always there for you," he said slowly before cocking his head. "But we were not." Vision had been capable of emotion, but he rarely expressed it unless he was around Wanda. That's why seeing him now, and hearing his words with the inflections in them, had Peter staring. "When you turned to us for reliance," he said quietly and softly, "we were not there. This by no means infers that we do not accept your forgiveness, but such a statement should not be given without us first apologizing for what you have forgiven us for."

Peter blinks and looks around the table, suddenly overwhelmed by the guilt on every single one of the Avenger's faces. He swallows the lump in his throat and doesn't even jump as Steve places a hand on his arm.

"I speak for the entire team I think when-"

"No," Peter shakes his head quickly. A small smile creeps onto his lips and he makes eye contact with everyone, stopping at Steve. "I've heard enough apologies. I mean that. If I hear 'I'm sorry' again, I'm gonna throw punches," he joked with underlying seriousness. His voice sobered. "I've forgiven all of you. I know why you did it. And that's all I'll say about it. It's done. You're my family, and that's what family is for." He looks at Nat and smirks, "You're meant to piss me off." She smiles knowingly at him. "But yeah," he says, taking a deep breath, "I'm done with apologies. That goes for all of you."

Everyone nods, sharing individual glances at him that are still apologetic. Peter accepts them and leaves it at that before he runs a hand through his hair, able to breathe easy again. A smile is on his

face as he glances around the table before his gaze suddenly freezes and his smile falls.

"Peter, what?" Natasha frowns with concern, seeing him from across the table. The chattering stops as everyone looks at the teen.

Peter narrows his gaze, his full attention on Tony's plate. There were still three pancakes there, barely touched, the syrup gone from being soaked in. He racked his memory for the man getting seconds and couldn't find any, in fact, he had only seen him pick up the fork once.

This had been their first true meal besides popcorn.

They had cheeseburgers but- Tony had not eaten more than one, and this was after days without food. Peter suddenly remembered Rhodey's shocked face, the look he gave Tony, and the line that said he was glad they had gotten food. Tony's confession about how he stopped eating their weekly cheeseburger even seemed out of place. He had said he 'hadn't...since', and Peter realized it didn't just mean cheeseburgers.

Before that, Peter had had some food at the hospital but Tony had not.

And earlier than that they were held captive, and had not had food for two days. Peter had been fed earlier, but Tony had not. And the man hadn't even reacted.

More importantly, the Avengers hadn't even reacted. It was clear Tony's plate was full yet no one said anything. It was only a shock to Peter because he hadn't known where to look. They had known, and they no concern had been raised which meant....

...that this had been happening for a while.

His gaze tinted red and his eyes stung. Peter pointed and looked up in anger, "How long as this-"

A couple people answered.

"Three months," Natasha said firmly.

"Since you and him..." Clint trailed off.

"Every since you two..." Rhodey mumbled quietly.

"A while, kid," Steve spoke softly.

Peter stared in anger at the plate, his hand curled into a fist. It was anger but it was also shock. He and Tony had an understanding recently, that they would tell each other what they went through for the three months they were apart. They were not complete open books like they were before, because there was three months of secrecy to work through. Here was another reminder that they had been broken and ripped apart. He would have caught that, had they not split apart. Or it would have never happened in the first place. Not only was he mad with himself, but also with Tony.

Starting off by telling him that he had stopped eating as much was something Peter was furious he hadn't started with.

"Kid, it was bad before," Steve admitted quietly. "But when you came into his life, it got better. He didn't just stop drinking, Tony was eating again," he said.

Peter remembered Tony pouring the glass and bottle down the drain, realizing that he probably started drinking after they went their separate ways.

Rhodey looked around with a small snort, "he surprised the heck out of me when you and him went for cheeseburgers."

"I saw your face," Peter said, finding his voice, "but I never thought..."

"After Afghanistan, and the burger he requested," Pepper added with a small smile, "his appetite got a lot smaller. I'm guessing they didn't feed him a lot there and that habit carried over. We've been trying to help him get back into his normal groove, but the closest we got was when you showed up two years ago," Pepper said quietly.

Natasha nodded to Peter, "And when you guys split, it was like we were back at square one."

Peter looked incredulously around the table at the sober expressions on every single one of their faces. He had no idea. This entire time he had no idea. This family cared for Tony more than he would ever know, they had been trying to help him while Peter had let him walk out and had gotten out of his life. And now back, he hadn't noticed. Why hadn't Tony told him, but *why hadn't he noticed?*

"Because he didn't want you to know," Steve answered. Peter jumped as he realized he had asked the burning question out loud under his breath; it had just escaped. The man's eyes were comforting and he said, "Tony cares about you more than anything. If he knows something will hurt you, he will keep it as far away from you as possible." Steve shrugged, because it was that simple. "That's exactly what he did. He didn't want to tell you, and didn't want you to find out. So you didn't. Because he loves you."

Peter blinked, staring at the plate in shock as he took a breath. His mind and thoughts were swimming.

"You can always reason with him," Rhodey insisted with a small smirk of encouragement. "Talk to him about it, kid. Especially since now you're...his son."

"You kidding me? That's been a known fact for about two and a half years know," Clint muttered. He was hit in the stomach by Nat while stretching before he could block the hit. Clint scowled, rubbing his sore ribs and spluttering in defense, "Hey, I'm a dad. I know the look from a mile away."

Tony chooses that moment to re enter the room with a new carton of orange juice and not everyone has had time to wipe off the somber expressions from their faces. Tony frowned at the gloomy appearances and muttered, "Jeez, who died?" He replaced the orange juice in the fridge as he waited for someone to answer. Peter had yet to turn and meet his eyes

"No one," Steve grins, clasping Peter on the back as he stood. "We just heard about it all. So congratulations again, I think that goes without saying."

Tony shook his hand with a smile, "But you said it anyway."

The team got up from the table, Pepper giving a nod to Peter who stayed where he was. Everyone started clearing their plates and Tony attempted to as well but Peter's hand latched onto his arm as his fingers folded around the edge of the ceramic.

Tony instantly thought something was wrong with him as he slid into the chair and faced him, asking, "Peter, what's wrong?"

"Maybe you should have lead with the fact that you weren't eating?" Peter said quietly, looking up at Tony in confusion.

The man's face fell and his arm relaxed beneath Peter's grip. He looked guiltily down at the plate in front of him and lowered his head. "I-"

"You didn't tell me?" Peter hissed.

Tony didn't answer.

"*Me?*"

Tony's gaze snapped up at that in shock. There was so much pain in his eyes from that sentence that had so much force behind it. Those one word held so much meaning that Tony didn't know what to say. They stared at each other, Tony trying to explain why he didn't mention it, Peter countering why he should have. There was a clash and there was an understanding. No words were spoken, but apologies were made.

There was complete silence.

Peter rubbed his eye and took a breath, leaning back in his chair, "You're not gonna convince me that it's okay, or make me ignore this. We're fixing it. Now. And I don't want to hear it. Understand?"

Tony blinked, locking eyes with him. He nodded slowly. "Okay, kid."

That's all it was.

Simple as that.

And they took comfort in the simplicity because that's all it had been before. If they had gotten mad at one another, a few words fixed it. If they needed something done, it was a short exchange. Or there were no words spoken at all.

Peter nodded once, hands gripping the sides of his chair and then he got up, grabbing the different flavored syrups that were still left, "I'm gonna put this away now." His voice became gentle and he patted Tony's shoulder, his hand lingering. He glanced pointedly at the plate as he said with a pleading tone, "Finish your food, k?" He didn't need Tony to respond as his hand fell off the man's shoulder and he walked to the kitchen. They did their best talking when no words were spoken.

And for the record, anyone who thought that Peter didn't care about Tony as much as Tony cared about him would be asked to leave the compound. That was a known fact.

After breakfast, the Avengers had retired to their offices, some getting on a jet to go to a conference. Pepper had a meeting, so once again Tony and Peter were left to heal. They both were severely injured still, everyone had kind of forgotten due to the fact that they acted like they were perfectly fine. They returned to the lab later and went back to random projects.

Peter was sitting on the counter, fiddling with one of the blasters he had fixed, trying to reprogram it. He hadn't sneezed since breakfast which held Tony's dad concern and cold supplies like tissues, more tea etc, at bay.

The man was across from him in a chair so he didn't have to stand on his bad leg, spinning himself from side to side absentmindedly as he worked on the wiring for a panel. He shot a look at Peter once in a while, always at different times because they knew when the other would look. It was just out of assurance. Being separated and nearly killed together caused them to be slightly more

protective.

It was happy silence.

It was familiar silence.

It felt like home.

The man looked up once he was done and said hesitantly, "Hey, kid, we gotta talk about some stuff."

"Yeah?"

Tony frowned, "The funeral is in two days." Peter tensed. Of course he would tense; it was a sore subject. He hated bringing it up, but they couldn't keep putting it off as much as he wanted to. Tony tried to make his voice as gentle and soft as possible, eyeing the kid warily to know when to stop, "I've taken care of everything, you don't need to worry about it," he assured him.

"I've been to too many funerals," Peter muttered quietly.

Tony's heart was clenched tightly and he physically winced at the pain in the sixteen year old's voice, "I wish you hadn't."

"I'm not going to yours," he announced with a small smirk. "I'm gonna die before you so I don't go to yours. I know that's selfish, but I don't care. I've been to too many."

There he was again, like father like son, trying to make light of the situation with underlying seriousness. Tony waited a second and then said, "You know I can get you a suit, right? We can just go get one-"

"No," Peter shakes his head. "Mine's...." he trailed off.

Tony nodded once the kid realized where he was going with this, "I didn't know if you wanted to do that or..."

"Go back to the apartment," Peter finished with a knowing nod.

"Yeah," Tony said quietly, his hands falling to his lap, his chair stilling. He could hear the hum of the machines it was so quiet. His gaze was trained on his kid who was blinking as if to rid tears. "I mean, you can't wear Stark Industries merch forever," he joked lightly.

Peter straightened and tried for a smile, "No, I guess not. They're comfy though, especially the sweat pants. I'm keeping some."

"They're supposed to be comfortable, otherwise people won't buy them," Tony snickered.

Peter laughed once and then returned to silence. He was picking at his cast before he straightened, taking a shaky breath and nodding, blinking away tears, "I've got to go back. I do. I've been avoiding it, and that just proves I have to go back. Maybe tomorrow."

"Okay," Tony agreed softly. "It's up to you."

"I don't want to," Peter admitted, rubbing his nose with a fake smile as he took a breath, "But I'm tired of running. I'm tired of turning my back and pushing it all away. I've accepted it...so I- I need to go back." Tony nods to him, not knowing what to say. "But I- I don't want to sell the place," Peter cursed, his voice breaking as he blurts out what he seems to think is a confession.

"Of course not," Tony assures him, "Pete, I took care of it."

Peter looked up in shock and gave him a small smile, "Thanks. You know it's not gonna just be hard because....because of May. I spent my last three months in that apartment and they were the worst three months of my life. That's also why I didn't want to go back."

Tony nodded in understanding.

"And I do need to tell you about it because you deserve to know," Peter said, but then FRIDAY's voice rang out.

"Sir we have an unauthorized entry. I found it on our private server. Public alert was overridden."

Tony winced as he stood, alert, "Who?" His first thought was HYDRA and his gaze flicked to Peter, determined to keep the kid safe.

"General Ross sir." Crap. Worse.

Tony cursed, "What the hell does he want?"

"He knows your location sir, he got it from the front desk."

Tony cursed again, louder this time and Peter slipped off the counter warily. Tony shoots the kid a look and rolls his eyes, swiping the data away from the screen, not wanting Ross, who probably couldn't understand it anyway, to see it. He shakes his head, "The guy has a badge and a title and thinks it gets him whatever he wants. He's coming here?"

"Yes sir."

"Tell Rhodes and Steve, get them in here as soon as you can," Tony said firmly.

"Will do."

"Is he pissed that I punched him?" Peter says nervously.

Tony smirks and forces a smile. Ross showing up uninvited was never good and his panic was raising inside of his chest. "Probably. You may have to punch him again. It wasn't like you knocked a screw loose though."

Peter gave a half-hearted laugh and rounded the table to take the seat next to him, just to be closer. Just in time too, because the lab door opened. Tony and Peter peeked out and waved as the man stormed in with four men at his side.

"Woah, you have personal body guards now?" Tony grinned, flashing him a fake smile.

Ross narrowed his eyes, his gaze cold as usual, but colder than Tony was used to seeing. It put him off guard and out of instinct he casually sauntered forward to type something into his computer, positioning himself in front of Peter as he did so without anyone knowing, except Peter of course, because the kid always knew.

"I'll make this short and sweet, Tony," the man snarled.

"Please, we have actual work to do," Tony responded quickly.

Ross' gaze flicked to Peter who was eyeing him warily and his lip curled, "I hear you have adopted Peter?"

Tony tenses and he nods slowly, his gaze firm. "Yes," he says shortly. He knows where this is going. And he hates it. He's scared. His arm reaches backward just slightly out of protectiveness, assuring himself that the kid is still there behind him. Peter moves closer to him out of instinct, their glares identical as they set their hatred on the man standing feet away.

Ross smiles at their discomfort and says what both Tony and Peter are fearing, "I'm here to make sure that doesn't happen. I'm deeming you unfit and placing a charge to terminate your parental rights."

God.

No.

Tony's entire world stops. He suddenly can't breathe. He's giving Ross the exact reaction the man wants but he can't help it. His lungs tighten and burn and his throat closes. He fumbles for the chair to keep himself standing.

"No," Peter says firmly, stepping closer to his side as he shakes his head. "No, you can't do that."

"I can and I will," Ross says firmly, crossing his arms and looking at Tony in absolute joy, his eyes practically glinting. "You enjoy pissing me off. Because there are no repercussions." He walks forward and his men follow and Tony has never been so afraid in his life. Not afraid of the man, but afraid that Peter will be taken away from him, just when things were about to work out. Ross' voice was calm, as if he knew he had won, teasing Tony's fear, "You do whatever you want, say whatever you want to me, and you get away with it. Because you're Tony Stark," he hisses in envy, making a mockery of Tony's reputation.

It's Peter who gets pissed. His face goes red and he looks like he's about to punch the man again. Tony prays he doesn't, but he can't even turn and look at the kid. He's frozen in fear of losing him.

"You're *Iron Man*," Ross snarls in his face and Tony jumps in shock as he realizes the man is right in front of him. Peter's arm brushed his back, the kid's glare fierce, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

Ross ignores the boy as he towers over Tony with a smile. The man speaks sweetly, "But now is time where you take responsibility for your actions." Then, without warning, he pushes Tony in the chest with fire in his eyes. Tony stumbles back only slightly, wincing as his bullet wound is jarred. But he does nothing.

There's a low growl from behind him. Peter surges forward, pulling Tony back as he does so with a snarl of, "Don't touch him you-"

Tony flicked his gaze to the kid who was suddenly shoved back by the Ross' men. Peter's nostrils flared and his fist curled, prepared to take every one of them out to get to Tony and kill the man who had dared even touch him. But Tony snapped, "Pete, no."

The teen locked eyes with him, his expression angry, fearful, worried, downright terrified and confused. There might have even been hot tears. One of the man dares to put his hand on Peter's shoulder tightly and Tony's gaze snaps to him. He had once been calm, but that was gone now.

Tony grabs the man's sleeve and very simply, "Let him go, now, or I will blast you into the next room." His voice shakes because he can't stop it and he hisses brokenly, "You want to try me? I said let him go, so help me-" His voice is shattered and there is a crazed look in eyes that never cry. Right now they're filled with tears.

The men immediately let Peter go and stepped back warily, Tony's look of utter death following them until they were a good distance away. He was shaking with anger or fear, he did not know which. Possibly both.

Peter shoved him off as well, his gaze softening at Tony's protectiveness before he returned his gaze on Ross and protested, "But-"

"Pete, stand down," Tony said again firmly.

"Yes, Pete, stand down," Ross mocks, his gaze on Tony at least until the teen yells at him.

"Only Tony gets to call me that you pathetic little-" Peter trails off but his glare does not and Ross' confidence dwindles as he sees a bit of Tony Stark fire in the kid's eyes.

At Peter's anger, Tony raises his eyes to meet Ross'. His voice is thin, but firm, "This is between you and me, not Peter. Leave him out of this."

Ross makes a face and smiles, "Exactly. Between you and me. But the only way to hurt you is through him."

Tony feels a literal blade sink into his chest. He had been worried about villains, actual villains trying to exploit his weakness being Peter, but he hadn't considered the fact that there was poison within his own walls. And now the serpent was striking, and Tony was defenseless. Something inside of him was being twisted with a cold fist, and he could barely manage a glare. All of his strength left him.

Until Peter tenses and makes a small sound. It's quiet, and only Tony can hear it, but it makes his world stop. Peter knows the way to hurt Tony through him, but also the way to hurt him is through Tony. They are undeniably, unhealthily, codependent. They couldn't be separated. Not after everything. And Peter let out a strangled sound of defiance, of fury, of absolute determination that clashed violently with the fire in his eyes, and Tony knew exactly where he had gotten it from.

Ross had thought he could come in here and expect Tony to buckle and fall. That he did, because Ross knew which spots to hit; threatening his kid, his literal kid, would bring any father to their knees. Yet it would also make them stand. Once again, Tony put aside all of his emotions once Peter was threatened, once he had let out what seemed to be a controlled sound of both anger and fear. Maybe if the one kid who anchored him had not been here, it would have been a different story. Because not only was Tony Peter's anchor, but Peter was rightfully Tony's. Here Ross was proving that they were not weaker together, but stronger.

Because you cannot tell a ship to move when it's anchor digs itself deeper into the stand.

His eyes had been cast downward the entire time because he didn't want Ross to know the impact of his words. They flicked to the side when Peter let out an inhuman sound that filled him with rage and let his blood boil. He had taken hits for the kid, he had gotten a dislocated shoulder for the kid, a knife for the kid, and bullet for the kid and he would do it again, meaning he would stand now, just as Peter was.

Now he was angry. The man in front of him was threatening his kid. A second ago Tony was scared. Now he was pissed.

Ross was speaking but Tony didn't even care, the man's words swimming uselessly in his ears, his vision red, "So I will do my very best to make sure, that you never see him again. And I promise you that," Ross finished. His gaze is even, confident, and conniving. Tony knows he's serious.

"Even if it ruins me," he adds just to spite.

Tony raises his gaze, and it makes Ross take a step back. "Are you done?" he snarls. Peter perks up at his voice and smirks knowingly, returning his furrowed brow to Ross.

The General opens his mouth and then closes it, confused as to why Tony was not cowering, begging, even. But why would someone beg if they were determined to protect the person they cared about? Ross had thought doing this in front of Peter would make the man weaker, but he was far from right.

"Two things," Tony said firmly, and Peter moves up to his side. The man's voice is cold and promising, "If you even consider taking the kid somewhere while we figure out this crap show that you've decided to make, I will kill you. Do I make myself clear?"

"You wouldn't-" Ross sneered.

"Do look like I'm joking, Ross?" Tony whispered calmly. Peter resisted a smile; he knows what that voice means. Quiet was almost worse than loud and Ross knew it too. Over the years of working with the man he had detested, he had never believed him more.

Ross doesn't answer, in fact, in order to try and regain the footing he had lost, he scoffs. Tony's had enough. Without hesitation he lunges forward and shoves the General hard in the chest in retaliation. Ross stumbles back in shock, hitting a chair. He would have fallen to the ground had one of his men not supported him. The General shoves his man off in embarrassment and he stands, straightening his suit. He goes to glare at Tony and shrinks back when he meets the glare of not only the man, but his kid next to him, and the two look strikingly similar.

One of his men steps forward as Tony advances, as if to try and stop him from coming closer. Tony simply cocks his head and asks, "You want to go against Iron Man? Even with a broken arm I can still wipe the floor with you. *Back. Up.*"

Peter, who stands next to him, sneers, "And get a new job."

Tony nods in approval and raises an eyebrow. The man who had once been broken has never been stronger, his eyes flashing. "Two," he continues, his voice even. "You said you'd go through with this even if it ruins you? I will be the one to ruin you. I promise you that," Tony hissed. He shares a look with Ross before tossing his head sharply to the door, "Now *get. out.*"

Ross blinked in shock and remained unmoving. Before Tony could, Peter repeated him, his gaze equally as scary. "He said get out," he hissed through his teeth.

The General turns and moves his head to the door, his men following him, away from the Stark's who were standing firm next to each other, their gaze fierce. But there was worry in the deepest spots of their hearts because they both knew the man who had just left intended on keeping his promise, which was tearing them apart.

Salem, Oregon

The girl with long black hair, a sweet smile, and wide eyes scribbles in her work book, studying for her chemistry test. It's a nice night, which means her window is open, the cold air drifting in, ruffling her curtains. Her light is on in her room, shedding a soft glow on both her and her desk which is against the window. Bright enough that someone could see her from outside.

Someone does see her. A man, badly burned, his arm broken, beaten and bruised. The hits had come from an enemy, a person he hated, because they had shown them what a bad person he was, or had become. A tear trickled down his cheek from one eye, the other was covered with a large scar, the skin cauterized. But he could still see the girl in the window.

His hand was clenched, his breathing layered and shaking. If she knew he was here she would no doubt call the cops, scream even. Which was why he did not call to her. Not even as her mother's, his wife's, voice came from the lower level, calling her to a late dinner. The girl responded and the man's heart shattered at her soft tone. She closed her book and turned off her light, her room growing dark.

He lowered his gaze and saw his wife by the table, looking beautiful as ever, his daughter emerging from the steps- she had gotten even taller- as she went to help her mother set the table. He looked at the empty chair at the end and deemed it his. He should be there.

Part of him wanted to burst in and sit down, but that was proof that he shouldn't. Which was why he had come here. To apologize to his family for what he was about to do, what he was about to give into, what he was about to become. He had never wanted this, he had always done what he had for his family, and his family alone. It had all been for his family, and now it was no longer for his family. He had lost the ounce of morality he had had left.

The spot that had been stripped from him, that until recently had kept him human, was where his hatred thrived. The person who had done this to him, had made him realize what an evil person he was. It had scared him, the internal struggle was physically and mentally tearing him apart, but it no longer did. *That* should worry him, but it didn't. All that remained, all that he could rely on was the pain and the anger. And he hated himself for it. He hated the person who had done this to him for it. And now his eyesight was red and blurred with tears, his entire body shaking as sobs built in his throat. They emerged as a singular low growl.

His chest still ached when he took a breath from the heel that had been ruthlessly slammed into it, breaking and shattering ribs. His jaw twitched from the fist that had landed against it. His bad ankle and knee caused him to limp whenever he took a step, courtesy of it being twisted in the wrong direction deliberately, and kicked in to drop him to the ground. He had not surrendered, but he had paid the price. He had a long scar across the side of his head from the chair that had been dug into his skull, knocking him unconscious. The burns, broken arm, and lost eye had been from the collapsing building, not from the person he swore revenge against.

In a way, he realized, that was better. This way there were said to be no survivors, but there had been one. How was unknown, because the explosion had been great, it had wounded him terribly, more than the explosion on the beach so many months ago. He had still managed to crawl out, to dig himself out of his own grave, flames taking half of his sight and crippling his body, but he was still breathing.

So there remained one survivor, possibly the most dangerous one. More dangerous than Rich, or the men behind the operation, more dangerous than Damian himself possibly. One who now had nothing left to live for, no family to return to, no life to fix. Just a few friends who still helped him travel the county to get to Oregon, to find his past life and to leave it. To see them one more time and say goodbye to the man he was before he embarked on his suicide mission. One who knew what he had to do, and had no other reason in life.

He had to wait, but time was also his ally. He would gain strength.

He was going to look the person who did this in the eyes, and his would be filled with hate. And then one of them was going to die.

And Toomes was going to make sure it was Peter Parker.

Liz sat down at the table and her attention drifted to the window when she saw movement out of the corner of her gaze. Their front lawn was empty and she frowned and shook her head with a small smile before going back to her dinner, an innocent and unknowing smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

IGHT SEE YA!

JKJK well not jkjk but jkjk ANYWAY. So Peter and the Avengers are gooddddd which is sweet, and DUN DUN DUN cliffhanger #2 (yeah im not going in order) Toomes is NOT dead >:) and he's pissed. Meanwhile we got the funeral coming up, Peter's gotta go back to the apartment, still work out his relationship with Tony because they still have things to discuss, go to school at some point, etc etc (a whole punch of angst and comfort, ill find a balance) all whileeeeeee cliffhanger #1, Ross is trying to tear him from Tony, and that man will not stop. He's not kidding, i can promise you that. One of them will go down.

Also omg writing Peter being sick was so freaking weied because im like CORONA! wash ur hands petey i write him sneezing and im likeomg that has a 2020 vibe. dont mind me, im just being weird over here and I cant explain why so i hope you understand XD

So a bunch more to come because i take it no one wants this story to end and neither do i, but sadly, we must take a small hiatus. Im sorrrryyyy friendssss :) I will be gone a week and then just give me a couple days to get a new chapter out and we'll be back in business <3

I will try my best to answer comments while I'm out because yall are incredibly supportive and absolutely awesome but if i don't get to urs I apologize :(know that you have made my day though!!!!

So drink coffee, get sleep, don't die, and stay on the edge of your seat my friends!!!! I will miss you all so much <3 See you in about a week and a half

I love you all 3000 <3 <3 <3

A Moment Lasts a Second. Memories Last Forever.

Chapter Notes

HI EVERYONE YOU LOVELY READERS

GUESS WHOS BACK

I missed yall so much!! I know I said this was coming out tomorrow but i couldn't help myself and figured yall can handle some spelling errors (I will explain that in 2 seconds) if it means a day earlier!!! Also because I just needed to get this out and like i predicted I had a huge spree. Not writing for a week literally killed me inside you have no idea XD I felt so wrong. But now i am here and we are back in business and not wasting any time. We're starting off seconds after the last chapter ended, and have a lot of hype to come!! Ok also I just figured this out because i wrote jhdegfxewa and no squiggly red line showed up so my spell check is kinda screwy rn so imma try and fix it but if i dont and you see a spelling error because i know there will be more than usual.....i blame technology. And me, but mostly technology *looks around sipping coffee*

ANYWAY

Thank you guys so much for being so patient and encouraging, i read all of your comments and replied as soon as i could (sorry it was a lil late) and yall are just the best.

This has been possibly my fav story to write because you guys have made it so fun and the support is just incredible. So thank you so so much for all your enthusiasm and i wont give anything away about this chapter, ill discuss it at the end note. But heads up it's over 11k dont ask me how i wrote this in 4 days but i did. There are some flashback lines so skip through those if you want but i love pulling stuff from previous chapters. This is kinda a stepping stone chapter, an emotional one that fixes some stuff so thats why theyre slipped in there. Sorry if thats not ur jam its only for this one. Next couple will be more action oriented i promise :) just wanted to ease back into the plot because I was away for a bit lol. Omg I said i wouldn't say anything about this chapter. Before I go spoiling everything XD read on you awesome people! And as always, get some coffee, get some sleep, and uhhhhhhhhhh stay healthy!!

Super glad to be back and i will shut up because this is the longest note I think ive written, if you are still reading dang ilysm<3 <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Not a second has passed since Ross had walked out.

He had stormed off with his men and had left Tony and Peter standing in the middle of the lab.

It was like the air had been sucked out of both of their lungs. When the footsteps faded and FRIDAY took the initiative of locking the doors, there was no need for the strong persona that they had overtaken. With no one to direct the anger that kept them standing, they were left to the original feelings of terror, shock, despair, and utter horror.

Peter's hand found his way to Tony's sleeve and it just stayed there. And that was that. For about 40 seconds that was all it was. Tony stared at the door, and Peter's fingers curled around his sleeve by his shaking hand. Both staring at the door. Finally Peter's legs buckled slightly and he reached

for the person who was having just as much difficulty standing, but would find the courage when his kid needed him. He gripped Tony's shirt and staggered to face him, eyes wide with the panic and shock they both shared.

"I know, kid," Tony breathed quietly before Peter could even say anything. He beat him to it with a desperate act of assurance. Even he couldn't believe what had just taken place. Ross had finally snapped and taken his anger out on them in one of the worst ways possible. Tony internalized his fear solely because of the reaction the boy in front of him was displaying. The toll it had taken on the two of them was tremendous and the passing seconds felt like weeks. Far too long. He forced himself back to the present with the voice of the teen who needed him.

"He-" Peter gasped brokenly, his eyes glistening, voice cracking with anger and fear.

Tony could not tear his gaze of hatred from the door as he trembled slightly and let out, "I know. But I won't let him."

"Tony, he said-" Peter whispered, finally catching the man's gaze as he tugged at his chest almost, an innocent and childlike move that showed that Peter was vulnerable right now. Why shouldn't he be? The boy had been abandoned, tortured, beaten down and now...just when they thought things were about to look up and they were about to get that desperately needed break, everything came crashing down. He was grasping for Tony, literally, the one thing he had left, that he couldn't be separated from. And someone had threatened to do just that.

"I know what he said, Pete," Tony said gently, trying to keep himself calm for the boy. "But I told him what I'd do if he tried to take you away from here. We will settle this. We will end this," Tony nodded, locking eyes with the kid until he was nodding too.

"I'm not leaving," Peter snarled weakly.

"I know kiddo," Tony said with a smile. They were undeniably codependent and if that was bad, Tony didn't care. His expression crumpled and he grasped for Peter's good shoulder firmly, his gaze fire. "It's not gonna happen. Okay? It's not gonna happen. I just got you back, I'm not losing you again. I meant what I said, you understand me? I meant what I said. We aren't getting separated. Not again," he hisses.

Peter grips his arm with his good hand and nods, eyes blinking to hide the tears Tony knew were coming. He gulps and nods more firmly, taking a shaky breath. They both take a second, their hands in fists, to compose themselves. Tony rubs his head with his hand, looking over his shoulder at the door. Then Peter makes out, "He pushed you-" There was anger in his eyes, and the teen's gaze flicked to the door as if he wanted to go catch up to Ross and punch him again.

Tony chuckles, lowering his gaze before winking, "And I pushed him back harder, didn't I?"

A smile creeps onto the boy's lips. Then the door is opened and Peter instinctively backs towards Tony, curling his hand into a fist around Tony's sleeve, the man's eyes flicking up as he protectively pulls Peter towards him just in case his enemy decided to show up again.

Turns out it is only Steve and Rhodey and Tony lets out somewhat of a relieved smile as he relaxes his hold on Peter. "Did you guys stop for drive thru or something?" he drawled, trying to shed light on this dark situation. He wished that maybe things would have gone differently if his friends had been in the room but maybe minus the shove to his chest, he knew Ross would have done the exact same things.

"What the heck happened?" Rhodey demanded, looking around to see if anything was different or

on fire since that usually was the reason for alarm when Tony was in the lab. "FRIDAY yelled at us to get here as fast as we could-"

"Tony, what's wrong?" Steve asked quietly. He had locked eyes with the man and had immediately sensed there was something worse than he led on. The message had not been an exaggeration, Tony had needed them. And they had obviously just missed whatever had happened.

Tony didn't have the strength to answer. Luckily Peter did.

"Ross happened," Peter whispered and the kid's voice sounded....tired. Not beaten, just exhausted. Steve's heart went out to the kid, especially since that was all he said. Knowing the poor boy wasn't going to elaborate he looked at Tony for an explanation, knowing full well the man didn't want to give one (in fact, he looked almost worse than Peter) but knew he had to.

"Ross wants to take Peter," Tony croaked, clearing his throat and raising his shoulders with every last bit of strength he had.

That would explain it.

"You've got to be kidding me," Rhodey cursed in disbelief, shaking his head.

"That bastard," Steve seethed, feeling his hands curl at his sides.

"He's filing against me to say i am unfit to adopt him," Tony continued weakly.

"That's a load of crap," Rhodey hisses.

Cap ran a hand through his hair and almost spun around full circle in front of him. "What did you say?" he asked urgently.

"I told him to get out. And I told him I would end him. Which is what I am going to do," Tony said firmly. "This is the last straw with him. I'm getting him fired."

Rhodey and Steve exchanged looks for a split second. Steve knew better than to counter. Rhodey took this one because as much as the team had hated Ross they had never done anything to get him removed. He was too high up in the chain of command. They didn't think they could knock him down one peg even after everything he had done. It was almost to risky for the board's sake and with everything that happened, the Avengers didn't want to risk jeopardizing their relationship with the committee that had been behind their separation. But this may have to be the exception.

Rhodey spoke slowly, not even sure of himself but rather just putting the warning out there anonymously, "Tones-"

"No," Tony hissed. Steve and Rhodey both saw the look in the man's eyes and they took a step back. Tony's glare receded and he looked like he aged another year but his voice was firm as ever. "He threatened my kid. He's *done*. I mean that."

Neither countered that; it was true. And it was about time they took a stand against the evil bastard. Steve looked at the man intently and vowed to have his back.

"Well I'm not gonna defend that idiot," Rhodey scoffed with a slight smile.

"Whatever we can do to help, we're there. The entire team," Steve added, nodding at Tony who accepted his offer with a small smile.

Tony turned to Peter who had stayed silent and his face crumpled. Then his expression changed into that of a determined look as he reached and clasped Peter's cheek for a second before bringing his hand down to his side. "You don't need to worry about any of this, okay?"

"I kind of do," Peter insisted firmly with a small scoff. "He wasn't kidding, Tony."

"I know he wasn't," Tony assured him instantly. "And neither are we. We're gonna get rid of him this time. I'm done putting up with his crap."

"And how are we gonna do that?" Rhodey asks slowly. Steve looks over at him and nods because he had been asking all the questions that needed to be asked but no one wanted to hear.

Tony takes a deep breath and decides not to answer it with much detail. Instead he turns to Peter and grins, "We're geniuses. We'll figure it out. We always figure it out."

The small smile he gets in return and the flash in Peter's eyes that reminds him so much of his own is all he needs. God help the man that tries to take his son from him, the kid he had sworn to protect, the boy he would give his life for, the teenager that has changed his life, and the person he will not get separated from again.

Not this time.

"I've already got some lawyers ready," Rhodey said firmly. "And all of the best firms in the state have pledged to have your back. They won't be helping Ross, so unless he gets a law degree, he'll have to find some starter business to trust fall into."

"Cheers to having friends in high places," Tony sighed, but his hand was clenching and unclenching in plain sight of both his friends.

Steve and Rhodey were seated beside him in the living room, mulling over what the heck had just happened over the past thirty minutes. Peter had gone off to his room because the kid said he still wanted to go to the apartment. Tony was slightly shocked that he wanted to go through that today, but Peter insisted quietly, and Tony didn't argue with him. The boy was checking how much he could bring and Tony sunk down onto the couch with his friends because he was too weak to stand at the moment.

"I mean, let's think about this logically," Steve said firmly, putting out his hand. "There's no way this will go through," he said with a nervous laugh.

No one dwelled on the possibility that Peter would be taken from Tony, because there was, indeed, a slight chance. But they weren't even considering that, because none of them would let it happen.

"I know," Tony nodded, running a hand over his face. "But Ross is playing it so that we're walking on a thin line. I can't fight this without letting everyone know that Peter is my son. And that's not an option. That kid has been through enough, imagine if the entire world knew he was being adopted by me? He can't handle that, at least not right now. I need his identity a secret, at all costs."

"And Ross knows that," Steve curses, rubbing his chin.

"We can make that work for the time being," Rhodey nodded with assurance, scratching his head. "I can talk to the press and the committee."

"It can't get to a public case," Tony said firmly. He shakes his head and sighs in exhaustion, "Because then it's all over. Everyone will know."

"You're gonna need to go in front of the board. And soon," Steve said slowly. Tony gave him a look and Steve shrugged, "It's the only way, Tones. Get them to pull out before they even get in because we all know Ross is gonna try and recruit them."

"If you can nip the bud there, it will just be Ross against you, not the full support of the Board behind him. You'll have more of a chance," Rhodey nodded in agreement.

"If you can get them on your side-" Steve starts.

"They've never been on my side. If anything, they are just waiting for an excuse-" Tony curses.

"You just need to make sure they understand how idiotic this is. You may have to bring Peter in. We can arrange for a meeting without the press. Have the kid talk. Anything to get them to declare this a personal matter between you and Ross and not something they have to involve themselves in," Rhodey assured him.

"Make them decide that you and Ross should settle it as a conference room law dispute. They don't want it public any more than you do, Tony. It's a bad look for them, especially when the public looks at the facts if it gets to that point," Steve said, biting the inside of his cheek with thought.

"Cap's right," Rhodey nodded. "It puts them in an awkward situation and sheds a rough light. They'll want you and Ross to dissolve it."

"He won't stop," Tony shakes his head.

"You have to make him stop," Rhodey said angrily. "By whatever means necessary. Manners, even."

"Yeah, he'll definitely drop all charges if I say please," Tony sighed in dismay, running a hand over his face.

"You're gonna have to play dirty," Steve winced. "Because he's gonna play dirty."

"Oh, you don't say?" Tony drawled with a roll of his eyes, picking at a string on the cushion.

All three fell into silence.

"You know just after everything, I wanted him to get a break," Tony said. His voice was quiet and he sank his head into his hand, his chest aching from the healing bullet wound that still made itself known. He blinked, feeling very defeated, not for himself, but for Peter. Even after they were rescued, the kid was still being hurt and once again Tony was helpless to stop it. "The funeral is soon," he said in dismay, waving his hand weakly. "He's going back to school, he still wants to go back to the apartment- the kid needs a breather. And now Ross just dug the knife in the wound that is nowhere near close to healing," Tony hisses angrily. "What's next? Damian comes back to life?"

Steve and Rhodey lower their heads in agreement. "Damian's dead," Rhodey says quietly, just to assure him, eyeing him carefully.

"Well I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't," Tony gives a fake smile and runs a hand over his hair.

There's silence. Then Cap proposes the million dollar question. "How are you doing, Tony?" he asks quietly, eyeing his friend with compassion.

Tony meets his gaze and shakes his head dismissively, flicking his eyes back and forth with a slow and suspicious, "Fine? Why?"

"You know it's okay to want a break for yourself too," Rhodey urges gently.

Tony snorts, "Ok, what's with this? I get called narcissistic but then when I don't care about myself, you all tell me I need to care about myself more. It's a never ending cycle with you guys. I can't win." The last sentence had more weight and meaning than Tony intended and both Rhodey and Steve picked up on it, exchanging glances. They had been exchanging those looks for a while now. Everyone had noticed. Not only were the sarcastic quips from Peter and Tony painstakingly absent over the past couple days, except in rare short bursts, but both showed a different side when one was out of the room.

"I know how you act around him, Tony. You look tired and beaten when he's not looking. But the minute his gaze is on you, you're fine, acting like nothing is wrong," Steve points out with a raised eyebrow, Tony's trademark expression.

"Because nothing is wrong," Tony insists. "Except for the fact that everything is wrong. And I've gotten used to that. Hey kid," he smiles over Rhodey's shoulder and Steve twists in his chair, seeing Peter slowly walk in.

"Hey," Peter puts up his good hand and sinks down on the couch next to him, looking towards Steve and Rhodey, "We got a game plan for this idiot yet? Besides him dying in a hole?"

Tony smirks, "Yeah, yeah we do. Make sure the Board doesn't have his support, then one v one him personally with his wimpy lawyer and get him fired. All while keeping your identity a secret from the press. And playing very dirty because I have zero craps for this guy at this point."

"Sounds good," Peter nods. "I'm down. And give the same number of craps."

"We'll get to the Board before Ross does, I'll make sure of that," Steve nods and stands. He motions to the two of them, "Do you need someone to drive you to Peter's apartment or you got it?"

"We'll manage," Tony assures them both.

"Can you drive with a broken arm?" Steve wonders.

Tony gives him a look before he frowns and calls, "FRIDAY?"

"There are no laws against it," the A.I. says. "But if it affects your driving then law enforcement is allowed to pull you over."

"They wouldn't be able to tell with the way you drive," Peter mumbles quietly, a grin appearing on his face as Tony whirls to face him. Steve snickers and Rhodey hides his smile with his hand.

"What?" Peter laughs. "I'm not wrong."

Tony blinks and shakes his head, "Unbelievable. I am not a reckless driver."

Rhodey snorts, "Right. And Cap isn't a huge fan of the wizard of Oz."

"I am not a fan! I got one reference, that does not make me a fan," Steve groans.

Tony makes a face, "Whatever. You got super happy when you heard flying monkeys."

Rhodey looked around and grinned, grabbing the sides of the chair and pushing himself to his feet,

announcing, "We better be on speed dial. Letting you both go out on your own is a huge risk that we are taking. Big responsibility," Rhodey gives them a look.

"Shut up *mom*, I'm not a kid," Tony sneers, swatting him away.

"Who was the one complaining that they were injured this morning?" Steve raises an eyebrow, Tony glaring at him.

"I mean it, you call if anything happens," Rhodey insists.

"Yeah, yeah, speed dial Rhodey," Peter rolls his eyes and nods. "We'll take care of each other."

"I know. You guys always do," Steve says with a small smile and a wink. Rhodey clasps his hand on Tony's shoulder as he stands and he and Cap walk to the door. Peter salutes them both and they slip out.

The boy next to him arches his back and sighs shakily. Tony can tell a joke is coming to try and lighten the situation, "What if you just bribe Ross?"

"Well hey, Pete, that's a great idea. Like thanks for your two cents Ross, but here's one of my many bank accounts you can have if you just shut up," Tony snickers.

Peter laughs and runs a hand over his face, "I was just-"

"No it's fascinating input, I swear," Tony chuckles, a ghost of a smile appearing on his face at the grin from his kid.

"I'm just saying," Peter mumbles happily.

Tony pats his knee, "It's fine, kid. We've got it under control. Now let's go, I want to be back in time for pizza." Tony stands with the help of Peter and then starts for the door to get his keys. Peter sits there with a small smile for a second, because Tony is excited about food.

"Seatbelt," Tony says automatically as they get in the car. Peter pulls it on without a thought, his eyes staring straight ahead like he was zoned out and Tony gives him a look, "You okay?"

Peter looks over and blinks, "Yeah. Why?"

"You put on your seatbelt," Tony snickers.

"And?" Peter frowns.

Tony's smile fades and he shakes his head, "Never mind." He puts the car in drive and pulls out of the spot in the garage, heading for the gate. Three months ago they had been in this same car, the last time they had been in it together. Back when things were simpler. They may not be at each others throats anymore but the damage done was unmistakable. Tony let his mind wander since Peter didn't want to talk; the kid had his head pressed against the window, his lips a thin line.

"Seat belt," Tony automatically says to the teenager next to him.

"You're kidding?" Peter demands with wide eyes, stabbing his finger towards the clock. "We're late! Just drive!"

"Well we're not gonna get there if you go flying through the windshield," Tony snaps.

"Well then how about you don't drive like a maniac for once?" Peter shoots back.

"Oh I'm sorry, four year old, are you seriously arguing about putting a strip of polyester over your chest?" Tony drawls.

"If it's just a strip of polyester, why is it so important?" Peter argues. "Besides, I'm Spiderman."

Tony turns to look at him, "And is there a little fine print section that says 'can survive car crash without seat belt on'? Cause I didn't know you had a manual."

"You've got to be-"

"Eleven minutes!" Tony shouts.

"FINE!" Peter yanks the seatbelt over his chest. "DRIVE."

Tony blinks back the memory and finds that he can't manage a smile. Part of him wondered if he and Peter would ever reach where they were at their pre-fight days. If they would ever have the same relationship that they did. Suddenly Peter's phone buzzes, the one that Tony had given him after Ned had left, and the kid pulls it out groggily to an unknown number. He tenses, his hand curling around the seat. Tony understands. It was exactly what had happened when Damian called.

"It's okay kid, he's dead. Answer it, it's probably a friend," Tony says gently, trying to encourage the boy. How messed up was it that Peter couldn't even go two seconds without being reminded of the man that murdered his aunt?

Peter's shaking hand hits the answer button and he holds it to his ear, wincing as he whispers, "Hello?"

"PETER PARKER I SWEAR TO GOD!"

Tony can hear the voice even from where he is in the driver's seat and Peter flinches, holding the phone a couple inches away from his ear. "MJ?" he asks slowly, obviously recognizing the voice of his friend.

"You go missing for weeks, and Ned is the one who gets to work with the Avengers to get you back from some lunatic that kidnapped you? And you know he doesn't tell me anything cause he's a loser. Then you get back and don't call me?"

"I broke my phone," Peter mumbles.

"Ok. You get a pass. I was still worried about you."

Peter straightens, his eyes widening. Tony stares straight ahead but his lip curls. Peter asks, "You were worried about me?"

"Shut up Parker," MJ mutters. Then she blurts out, "Yes, I was. You happy?"

"A little," Peter admits with a smirk. That makes Tony smile. "I mean not happy that you were worried but I guess happy that...you were worried."

"Crickets," Tony whispers and Peter shoots him a look.

"Because that makes perfect sense. I need to know where the hell you've been and what happened." she demands. Peter doesn't answer, he's at a loss for words. The girl on the other end sighs, "Sorry. I'm sorry. I know you're going through a lot. Ned said he wanted you to explain. I'm- I'm just glad

you're okay." There's a pause. *"Are you okay?"*

Peter smirks and nods, "Yeah, I'm heading back to the apartment to go-"

"I'm meeting you there," MJ said firmly.

"O-okay?" Peter rubs his head. "We- we have a lot to talk about though-"

"I know we do. And I'm not gonna take long, you have stuff to do, I get that. But I get at least a five minute conversation in the lobby. See you in 15," she said before hanging up. Peter sighed and hung up the phone, running a hand over his face.

Tony looks over and asks, "You gonna tell her about Spiderman?" He rests his hand atop the steering wheel, slowing down in some traffic.

"I kinda think she already knows," Peter jokes, worried that MJ would be mad he hadn't told her sooner. It would probably come as a huge shock. He rubs his knee, "Yeah, this is probably as good a time as ever."

"You gonna tell her about me?" Tony asks, raising an eyebrow.

"If anyone should know it's Ned and MJ," Peter nods, shoving the phone back into his pocket. "So yeah."

Tony nods in agreement. "Well we'll be there in ten minutes if you want to get some shut eye, I don't know," he suggests slowly, taking note of the bags under Peter's eyes and the tired expression on the boy's face.

Peter shakes his head, "I can't sleep."

"Okay," Tony nods, before he falls back to silence. He looks over and sees plain unrest on the boy's face. His brow is furrowed, his hand is shaking, and his eyes blink every so often as he clenches his jaw. His entire persona changes, even his body language, with every passing minute. Tony can practically see the anger boiling in his chest. The boy isn't staring any conversations so Tony moves to the radio in an effort to snap the kid out of whatever trance he's in and asks, "You want to listen to-"

"No," Peter snaps. Tony knew that might happen. He respectfully goes to silence and sees Peter wince. The boy's voice is controlled and apologetic, but he can hear the slight wobble as if the teen is doing everything he can to stop himself from snapping, "Sorry. I just...I don't want to go back. I know I have to, which is why I am, but it's bringing up stuff I wanted to forget. I'm remembering some not so good times and it's screwing with me."

Tony nodded to show he understood where he was coming from and Peter gave him a half hearted smile. But he was tired of leaving things on loose ends, leaving problems just floating around that weighed down on them. He pressed his lips together and then spoke slowly, looking over, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Peter scoffs and shakes his head, "No, you wouldn't get it. There's still some crap that's piling up in here that I can't get rid of. I'm not exactly a clean slate just yet, Tony. I have a lot of stuff to put behind me and it's taking a while."

"And you think I don't understand that?" Tony almost laughed. Of course he understood that. There were millions of things that still kept him awake at night that had to do with him and Peter. The boy next to him made a face and turned away. Tony blinked and returned his eyes to the road,

gripping the steering wheel. But he said, "Pete, we haven't exactly gone into detail about how our three months went. Or talked about some other stuff after that?"

Peter scoffed, still not looking at him, "What the heck is that supposed to mean?"

"How about when I thought you ditched me and were okay with letting me die?" Tony snapped without even thinking.

"I didn't though," Peter snarled. "You were just too self centered to see that. Besides, wasn't that what you always wanted? You wanted me to be okay with you protecting me?"

"Yeah," Tony drawled, rolling his eyes. "But we always pushed that aside because of our unhealthy codependent relationship and love we have for each other." It was said as a joke, but under different circumstances and current emotions, both would have taken a second to understand the truth behind it.

"So I did the one thing you always wanted me to do, and now you're blaming me for it?" Peter demanded, still pressing. Tony had opened up this discussion foolishly, knowing Peter would not sit by and let him say what he did, especially not when it involved him.

"I'm not blaming you-" Tony snarled, his hands tightening on the wheel that his knuckles turned a pale white.

"You are. You're pissed that I didn't give you more clues, but you know what? I saved your life so maybe you should be thanking me-" Peter said furiously in disbelief.

"You want thanks? I took a bullet for you, is that thanks enough?" Tony hissed.

They exchanged angry looks and Tony cursed himself. They were on there way to the one place Peter didn't want to go. This was about the worst time they could argue, especially when Peter had even admitted he wasn't himself. This wasn't an argument. This was both of them letting out their feelings in an unhealthy way because the circumstances begged for it. The car was already filled to the rim with tension, at this point there was practically a cloud floating around.

Not wanting it to escalate, he promised himself he would keep his mouth shut despite what Peter said after. It worked for a while. Tony had been quiet and the kid looked over in confusion and anger as their gazes clashed. Tony tried to maintain his gaze on the road. He hated how prone to arguing they were. If this was a thing that would happen often, Tony hoped it would wear off because he was tired of arguing. He was tired of the anger, misdirected or not, especially since Peter was now being threatened. If something did happen before Tony could put a stop to this, he didn't want to be on bad terms with the boy he was trying to protect. And even now, going to May's apartment, he didn't want to make this harder for Peter than it already was. It wasn't fair to him.

"Look, I really don't want to get into an argument right now," Tony admitted slowly, looking over with as much genuine compassion as he had.

"Good, neither do I," Peter muttered in agreement. Silence. Tony was gonna leave it at that, but then Peter said, "But we need to talk about that. About a lot. I promise we will."

Tony smiled slightly and nodded, "Yeah, kid."

"Tony," Peter whispered. He was looking down at his shaking hands. "If I say anything I don't mean, I am sorry. I don't know if I can do this-"

"You can," Tony said with encouragement.

Peter shook his head, "You didn't let me finish. I don't know if I can do this without hurting you." Tony looked over in confusion, his face falling at the look on the kid's face. Guilt from something that hasn't even happened yet. "When I was in there for three months, I was alone. I was completely alone. And now I'm going back but I won't be alone. And I will do something that I wasn't able to do- lash out. Lash out to the one person who least deserves it."

"I'm the one who deserves it the most," Tony said softly.

"No," Peter shakes his head firmly, pressing his good hand to his mouth in a fist. "I just- I'm sorry in advance." Tony nodded in understanding. He could take it. He would take it if it meant Peter would get even the slightest bit of closure.

"You shouldn't have to take it," Peter whispered. Tony tore his gaze from the road in shock, confused because he hadn't thought he had said that out loud. "You didn't say it out loud. I just knew what you were thinking."

Silence.

What to say to that?

"Well it's been a while since that's happened," Tony said with a smile. Peter chuckled in response because it had. They used to know each other's every word before they were even a thought in each other's head. This was just a moment that showed they were healing, slowly trekking back to the relationship they had, proving they weren't completely shattered. Tony looked over and ruffled his hair, daring to take his hand off the wheel. "Just don't punch me and we'll be all good."

Peter smirked, "No promises. I'll try my best. Can't say the same for MJ though."

"MJ is not going to punch me," Tony snickered.

"Twenty bucks," Peter said simply.

Tony made a face, "Make it fifty." Peter smiled and looked out the window after turning the radio on.

They pulled up at the street corner and Tony looked over, "You still want to do this, kid?" Peter was staring out the opposite window at his building, slightly trembling even though he tried not to show it. Tony had been surprised from the minute Peter had told him he still wanted to go.

"Kid, you don't have to do this right now-" Tony whispered.

"So when do I do it? Tomorrow? Because I'll be feeling better by then? Because this will all blow over by then? No," Peter said angrily, tears in his eyes. "Ross is not taking anything from me. Not you, not May."

Tony stood straighter and gave him a confident smile, nodding, "Okay...okay, Pete."

Peter shook his head and pursed his lips, leaning against the nearest chair. "Am I okay? No. Do I want to go back? No. I never did and now it's even worse. But I am tired of running, I am tired of letting people take my family from me."

The kid had left the room and started for his room after he said that, muttering that he needed to see what he could fit in his drawers and closet. Tony knew it was partly a lie and that the boy needed to

be alone for a bit, but that last sentence had meant more to him Peter had known and if the teen had just turned around in that moment, he would have seen the look on Tony's face.

Tony unlocked the car door and slipped out, Peter slowly pushing his open and stepping out, clutching the side of the car to straighten himself. Part of him knew Tony would try and come over and help so before he could he sucked in a breath and closed the door, hurrying over to meet him. He exchanged looks with the man and nodded, motioning for the door of the apartment.

Before they could get there however, Peter tensed, his spider senses tingling a second before he heard someone scream his name.

"PETER!"

He spun and saw a girl with brown curly hair storming towards him and he grinned, some of his anxiety fading away for the split second. She tackled him in a hug, Peter whipping his arm out so she couldn't crush his cast. He wrapped his free arm around her and rested his chin on her shoulder, wincing through the pain of the burns on his body that were sending searing pain through his chest.

"Ned told me about May on my way over," MJ whispered after a second, her voice soft. "I'm so so sorry, Peter." He had never heard that tone from her before. Nor had he ever gotten a hug from her. Peter blinked and held her tighter while he could. After a second they broke apart and MJ shifted on her feet, brushing back her hair, her RBF plastered on her face. This time however, Peter saw a hint of compassion that he appreciated. Her voice was gentle, her eyes full of concern, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm...I'm hanging in there," Peter smiled fakely but it was enough to fool her.

Her look was firm but her eyes conveyed her friendship. If she knew he was lying then she didn't pry. Instead she nodded and then curled her fist with an evil grin, "Okay, where can I punch you that won't hurt?"

Tony's eyes flew open and he wanted to step in front of Peter at that moment to protect him from whatever was coming at him, even if it was a simple punch. But the kid was not afraid, in fact, he was laughing and Tony forced himself to calm down after taking a simple step closer.

"Nowhere," Peter grinned. MJ sighed but still lightly socked him on the arm anyway. Peter chuckled and she smiled, "I haven't been able to do that in a while. Ned's been taking twice as many hits."

Peter laughed, "Well then I'm sure he's glad I'm back." He motioned over his shoulder to the building, "I thought we said we would meet in the lobby?"

MJ shoots him a look, "Well, excuse me, what was I supposed to do, let you walk in while I followed? We can still go in the lobby if your OCD needs you to?"

Peter smirks and bites his cheek, shaking his head, "No, no- it's- it's fine."

She nodded and shared a smile with him. Then a frown formed on her face and she muttered, "I'm still mad you didn't tell me what happened to you."

Peter scoffed and went back on his heels, raising an eyebrow as he drawled, "Uh, sorry. I was kidnapped?"

"Ah ah," she rolled her eyes. "I don't need your sass, although I may have missed it."

Tony's been watching the entirety of this and he finally puts his hand out, "Hi. I'm Tony Stark. Just wanted to say hi before I remove myself from this situation because I am third wheeling."

MJ's gaze finally flicks to him and she narrows her eyes, shaking his hand. She keeps her gaze on him for a bit before she lands a punch on his good shoulder. Tony looks up in shock and just stands there. MJ goes back to talking to Peter as Tony stares. Then he wordlessly digs into his pocket and then slaps a fifty into Peter's waiting hand, continuing to look at MJ in disbelief. He finally finds his voice. "You just punched Tony Stark, you do realize that, right?" he spluttered.

MJ puts her hands on her hips and she narrowed her eyes, "He deserved it. And he better know what that was for."

Tony did. Ned wasn't the only one who saw first hand how the three months had impacted his friend. MJ had too, he could see it in her eyes. Peter looked down and away but MJ kept her stare firm. Tony nodded and ducked his head down to show acknowledgement, "Yeah."

"You only get one punch though because I know you guys are somewhat made up and I know you would rather me punch *you* again then him," MJ shrugs. She meets his eyes and they flash. He is silent and she nods in satisfaction and flexes her hand, "I've missed punching people."

Tony pulls his phone out of his pocket and starts to back into the lobby, "Well you two catch up, I've got to take this. I know you have...a lot to talk about."

MJ nods and gives him a halfhearted wave before sighing, "He didn't have a call. What do we need to talk about?"

Peter looks up at her and suddenly can't find his voice. He wrings his hands and bounces on his heels, "Well...um. MJ, there's something that I need to tell you." His heart started pounding faster and he bit his lip. He could tell her that he liked her- no that was not the time. And Peter wasn't used to being happy. She didn't deserve someone who went through all the crap he did, and he wasn't about to put her in danger. He had learned well that the people he loved would get hurt, he wasn't about to bring her into that loop. But Spiderman, knowing that could protect her. His mind was made up. Spiderman first. Then that he was adopted by Tony, well that is if Ross didn't- no. Positive.

"Ned knows," Peter stuttered, gathering his thoughts as he shifted from foot to foot, "But I need to tell you and I don't exactly know how to say it..."

MJ raises an eyebrow, "Is it that you're Spiderman or that Tony Stark adopted you?"

"It's hard for me to-" Peter stops. What the- two out of three? He looks up in shock and hisses, "What?"

She rolls her eyes with a chuckle, "You think I wouldn't find out?"

Peter's mouth is dry and he squeaks, "No?"

MJ's face goes slack and she laughs nervously, "Wait, I was right about Spiderman?"

"Yeah," Peter says, his voice higher than normal. He's trying to breathe as he makes out, "And about the other thing."

"Well the other thing is obvious," she waves her hand desperately, her eyes bigger than he had ever seen. "But you're actually Spiderman? I was only like...67 percent sure." She takes a massive breath and asks, "You're not screwing with me?"

"No, no- MJ, why would I be screwing with you?" Peter said, still blinking in shock. "You're surprising the crap out of me right now."

"You're completely serious, cause' it's not funny," MJ said firmly, excitement creeping into her voice.

Peter nodded in disbelief again, "Uh uh. Dead serious. So you just knew?"

MJ rolls her eyes, taking a deep breath and shifting her feet like she was hyper, "Well yeah, I had a hunch. You and Ned weren't exactly quiet and once I figured out it wasn't a joke between you losers, I started putting everything together. It's pretty obvious."

"Obvious?" Peter says in dismay, his face falling. Did everyone at his school know then? That was just what he needed.

MJ pats him on the shoulder, "No! Not to other people," she snickers, shrugging. "Because no one really pays attention to you."

Peter scowls, shooting her a look and mutters, "Thanks."

"Except me," she added quickly, avoiding eye contact and brushing her hair behind her ear as her cheeks flushed pink. Peter's did as well.

"Because you were....putting everything together," Peter clarified slowly, nodding.

"Well yeah," MJ said awkwardly with some sort of laugh, glancing up at him.

"Only to find out if you were right about me being Spiderman...right?" Peter stutters, brushing his curls from his face self- consciously and scrunching his nose.

MJ scoffs and looks down, "Yeah." She pauses. "Duh."

Peter nods before he presses a hand against his head, "Okay, what about me and Tony?"

MJ rolls her eyes, "Okay *that* was the obvious one. You guys act like father and son already, and if you two have made it through the three month argument you had, and being kidnapped together, he's the first person that comes to mind. It's a no-brainer, Peter. You guys are just meant to have a relationship even with all the crap that's thrown at you. Don't forget that."

Peter gives her a small smile, "Thanks...MJ."

She pats him awkwardly on the arm, "Well I don't want to take up too much of your time, Spiderman- still can't believe I figured that out-" she giggled before composing herself and keeping somewhat of a straight face. "So...I'll let you get back. Just be safe Peter, okay?" She reached up and moved one of Peter's bangs out of his eye. Then she smiled and shoved him lightly in the shoulder before she puts her hands in her pockets and raises an eyebrow. "Don't get kidnapped anymore."

Peter snorts, regaining his balance as he responds, "I'll try my best."

She smiles, "Good. I'll see you in school. Take your time. And if you don't text me, loser, you're dead."

"Noted," Peter responds with a smirk.

MJ curses under her breath before she gives him another quick hug, tight but quick. Peter barely

has time to hug her back when she pushes away and crosses her arms, stepping back a foot. Then she points at him, "That never happened."

"Of course it didn't. You never display emotion," Peter agrees and she swats his arm before backing away with a small wave. Peter watches her go with a smile, smirking to himself. As she rounds the corner, Peter is left alone on the street and is about to walk in the lobby before he sees a familiar spot on the sidewalk. This is exactly where he stood when the biker had run into him. When- oh God, *Damian*, had run into him. When it had all started.

Peter cursed with what little breath he had left because he suddenly couldn't take in air. Tears came to his eyes as he became rooted on the sidewalk, staring at the place where his feet had been where he had first met his enemy unknowingly.

About to cross the street, a biker comes out of nowhere, flailing on his handlebars. He goes flying off and Peter drops his phone, kicking the bike out of the way and staggering to catch the man before they can both face plant on the sidewalk.

Peter laughs and steadies the person who grins and claps him on the back, "Holy- thanks kid-"

"You okay?" Peter asks as the man brushes off his pants.

"Yeah, are you? I thought I was gonna flatten you!" he exclaims, looking Peter over to make sure he hadn't hurt him.

"Luckily I've got good reflexes," Peter grins, picking up his bike for him.

"Oh crap kid, your phone-" the man's smile falters.

Peter picks up his broken phone, wincing at the cracked screen before looking down the street. He sees the two men, their hand up waiting for a taxi and Peter claps the man on the back before starting to jog away. He shrugs it off and points at him, "You know what, don't worry about it! Have a nice day, okay? Be safe!"

Be safe, to the man who had hurt him until he couldn't scream anymore.

Be safe, to the man who had put Tony through so much with a smile on his face.

Be safe, to the man that killed his aunt.

His enemy, he had met him, he had saved him from injury, he had held his arm with support with a smile on his face as a friend. A stranger who smiled at him, joked with him, was almost human.

It made Peter sick to his stomach and he felt his insides churn, his blood boiling. Tears came to his eyes but through them he could see Tony inside, and it made him straighten. The man was at the counter, playing with the pencil cup that was resting on the side near the edge. The desk was empty since the receptionist was speaking with someone in the corner and Tony aimlessly tapped the top of the metal container, not seeing how close it was to the edge.

The pencils toppled and Tony jumped, Peter reading a curse word on his lips. He flailed, looking around to see if anyone saw his clumsiness as he struggled to catch all of the pencils and pick them up off where they had scattered on the floor.

Peter sobbed as he let out a laugh, able to breath again, and he suddenly felt released from his internal prison. He could move again and he quickly wiped his eyes, looking around before quickly moving for the door and yanking the handle. He steps inside the lobby and comes up behind Tony

who is bent down, wincing in pain, scrambling to grab all of the pencils he had spilled across the ground.

"Nice one butterfingers," Peter snickers, making Tony jump. He handed him the last two and Tony scowled, putting them back in the cup. Peter hooked the man's good arm around his shoulder and helped him stand straight despite his protests. He had seen the look in his eyes that was pure controlled pain and the wince as he braced himself to get up by himself. Peter wouldn't let that happen.

"Ah, shut up. You saw that?" Tony muttered, taking his answer from the look Peter gave him. He motioned to the door, "How'd it go with MJ?"

"She predicted both before I even got the chance to tell her," Peter sighed. "So I guess....good."

Tony chuckled, shrugging, "Somehow I'm not surprised. I like her. She reminds me a little of Pepper. You ask her out?"

"No, Tony, I didn't," Peter rolled his eyes. "It wasn't exactly the right time."

"Okay Romeo, whatever you say," Tony said with a smile, starting for the steps. Peter followed him for a couple steps but soon tugged him to the elevator, shooting a look at the man's bad leg.

When they reached the top level and the doors opened, neither got out. They kind of just stared at the empty hallway. It was when the doors started to close that both Peter and Tony shot their hands out in sync and looked over at one another. They stepped out and let them close behind them, a small ding sounding as it lowered to another level. Peter took a deep breath and started walking down the hallway, Tony close behind him.

They slowed when they passed the door to the steps, Peter staring as memories flooded back to him.

He pushed his shoulder weakly into the door at the landing and stumbled into his hallway. Peter's vision spiraled and he tripped over his own feet, about to face plant in the center of the hallway.

Strong hands gripped his shoulder and fisted his jacket, keeping him upright and he heard a familiar voice say-

"Easy, kid," Tony whispered as his arm wordlessly slipped around Peter's shoulder. If he knew those were the same words as last time he didn't show it, and Peter didn't know if it was intentional or not. Yet it was just as comforting as the last time but Peter wouldn't pull away like he did before. He leaned into Tony's side as they walked down the wall in silence, coming to a stop at Peter's front door. The handle looked different, repaired, as if someone had smashed it off. Little did he know that it was actually Steve, and not the intruders.

Never mind who broke the handle, the new one which was very much locked seemed to stare back at him tauntingly. It was a doorway into memories he did not want to open, but knew he had to. Unwilling to make the first move, the boy wordlessly held up the key for Tony, looking him in the eye with a pleading expression, asking him to be the one to do it.

But surprisingly, Tony shook his head and nodded forward. He needed to be the one to do it. Peter faced the door and slowly unlocked it with shaking fingers and after a few tries. That was when Tony intervened and turned the handle, opening the door a slight bit.

"You got it, Pete," Tony said, his voice breaking at the very end.

Peter sucked in a breath and straightened, entering the apartment after pushing the door open. He flicked on the lights and looked around, tears welling in his eyes. Exhaling loudly, he felt Tony's hand on his shoulder and he straightened, trying to stop himself from shaking. Blinking harshly, he set his jaw and nodded to Tony to show he was okay, shoving the massive knot in his stomach down further as he rubbed his throat to get rid of the lump.

He made a beeline for his room and that's when he saw the overturned carpet, the broken picture frame, and the scrape on the wall. He pointed, "That's where they got you?"

Tony nodded silently, and Peter didn't miss his flinch. Tony scratched the back of his head from a muscle memory and then shrugged, giving him an unconvincing smile, "I'm good, kid."

Peter made a face and pushed open his door, walking into his room. Everything held a specific memory- the bloodstain on the carpet from when he had gotten clipped by a bullet and had proceeded to patrol for the next couple hours, worsening the wound. He remembered being on the ground, crying out in pain as he tried to stitch it up at an awkward angle, Tony's number on his phone waiting for him to hit call, but he didn't.

The poster that had been moved because Peter had lost it one night and flung his chair, the metal leg slamming into the wall and making a small indent and scrape.

He looked towards the corner that he sunk into many nights, the blanket and pillow that were on the floor for when he couldn't fall asleep in bed and went through panic attacks, some six hours straight. Peter felt his chest tighten and saw himself with tears streaming down his cheeks, nursing wounds, and trying to breathe.

He saw the drawer where he had shoved a picture of him and Tony slightly open and he walked over, rummaging through it, before a piece of paper sitting on the desk caught his eye. Peter's brow furrowed and he started to unravel it, the crinkle of the paper getting Tony's attention.

The man's eyes widened and he jumped forward, trying to grab it before he could read with a plead of, "Pete, no-"

Too late. Peter saw what was written in a font that looked almost exactly like his handwriting. He read the words in horror, his hands shaking.

You can do whatever you want to make up for what happened, but none of it will work.

I will never forgive you.

You don't care about me. You never did. And I wish I had realized it sooner. Like before we had met.

And I hate you.

Peter stared at the paper in shock, at a loss for words. Tears were in his eyes as he looked up at Tony, slowly shaking his head, trying to think of words to defend himself, to tell him that he hadn't written that. The same feelings he had let consume him when Damian forced him to listen to the fake voicemail, a pain Peter never wanted anyone to feel, had been pressed upon Tony too. He shook his head and spluttered, "Tony, I-"

Tony's hand went on top of his and he slowly pulled the piece of paper from Peter's shaking fingers. "I know it wasn't you." He tapped the paper with a smile, "You don't connect your P's." But his voice sounded broken and Peter knew that he had been fooled for at least the first read through.

"I'm sorry," Peter whispered, his eyes still on the paper, his limbs rigid. There was a deep pain in his stomach that made him feel sick.

Tony made sure he was watching as he ripped it in half and shook his head, "Don't. Don't." He crumpled up the pieces and tossed them in the trash, nodding to Peter. They had a silent agreement and Peter ran a hand over his face, composing himself, before he went over to his closet and yanking out the biggest suitcase he had. Mine as well take as much as he could now; with what he was feeling right now he did not want to do a second trip any time soon.

"Make sure you take your nerd shirts," Tony told him with a wink.

Peter smirked as he yanked his Star Wars and bad pun shirts, shoving them into the bottom of the suitcase, "Shut up."

"What is this stuff, salvation army?" the man scoffed, poking around on his desk.

"Garbage, actually," Peter corrected aimlessly, tossing all of his jeans and boxers into the suitcase as well.

"Okay, well keep like two of these things, I'm buying you replacements for all of this crap," Tony motioned to the low tech computers and different things Peter had fixed up over the years.

Peter scoffed, "No, I'm perfectly fine with-"

"Kid, these things look like they'll fall apart if you touch them wrong," Tony drawled, poking around at the tech and lifting up one of his web shooter repair models with a frown. He looked past it and announced, "I'm pulling the dad card."

Peter made a face, rolling his eyes, but he muttered, "Fine." He tucked his laptop inside his suitcase along with his school books, notebooks full of notes of webshooter and mask ideas, and a couple other things he needed. Then he went over to the closet and slowly unhooked his suit, pulling it out with pressed lips. He smoothed it out beneath the plastic and hung it on the doorknob, staring at it thoughtfully. He remembered the day May gave it to him, not too long ago. It was the second time he had cried in front of her, the first being when Ben died. That suit had more meaning than Peter was willing to let show. As close as he was with the man behind him, he still kept a few things to himself.

Tony gave him a comforting smile, his brow knit with confusion once Peter turned around and asked, "You okay?"

"I'm fine," Peter said, almost too quickly.

Tony nodded in understanding and gave Peter his space, before his gaze fell on a photo of him and Peter in their suits resting on the desk. He had his arm around the boy, both of them smiling and laughing. Tony remembered that day, and a warm feeling spread across his chest. Peter had kept the picture.

"Do me a favor and bring that?" Peter asked quietly as he zipped up his suitcase.

Tony looked over and nodded with a smile, "Sure thing kiddo."

Peter didn't respond, his knuckles white as he gripped the handle and pulled it out of his room, reaching into the bathroom and shoving a bunch of things in the open pocket. Then he looked up and said, "Okay. Let's go."

Tony looked around, worried the kid was avoiding coping with what was right in front of him. If he leaved now he would regret it, so Tony said quietly, "You sure you don't want to-"

"No, Tony I don't-" Peter snapped, turning on him with a glare. He doesn't need to apologize. But Tony realizes then that the boy hadn't just stopped his sentence, he was cut off because his glance had locked on something. There was a reason for his trail off.

Tony followed his gaze and saw a framed photo and Peter with May, both of them smiling and happy, outside of Peter's school. The boy let the suitcase fall to the ground as he numbly walked over and reached, picking up the photo with shaking hands. He sucked in a shaky breath, his thumb tracing the outline of the woman in the photo.

"May!" he sighs in relief and puts his phone aside as she hurries across the room with a choked sob and wraps him a hug, minding his bandages.

"Don't you ever scare me like that again, you hear me?" she demands, brushing a strand of hair back in place and kissing the top of his head.

He chuckles with a wince and rubs her shoulder, a content smile on his face.

"Hey sleepyhead," she greets, coming in with a water bottle that she hands as she sits on the edge of his bed, ducking under the top bar. "Glad to see you're finally up. And moving. You with me?"

She gently lifted his chin, brushing dripping wet hair out of his face. His cheeks were shined with rain, sweat and tears. He looked up at her and she had never seen him in so much pain. Peter shook his head, tears streaming down his face, rain dripping off his bangs and lashes, his eyes red. May tugged the blanket off Peter's bed and instantly wrapped it around him, Peter shaking so hard his teeth were chattering.

"Peter, I-" she whispered weakly, rubbing her thumb over his cheek to clear the drops that fell. She pursed her lips and murmured, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

A tear fell down Peter's cheek. He didn't have the strength to wipe it away. He didn't get to say goodbye. He didn't get to say he loved her, or not properly. He wasn't even sure she heard. He never got to tell her how much she had meant to him, how thankful he was for what she had sacrificed for him. Peter let the picture frame fall from his hands and it dropped the inch to the small table it had stood on. He did a circle, shaking with emotion, and everywhere he looked he either saw her, or he saw himself broken over the course of the three months.

Everywhere he looked he saw pain.

Everywhere he looked he saw anger.

Everywhere he looked he saw memories that would not leave him no matter how loud he screamed at them to just get out of his head. He didn't want this. He had never wanted this.

"Peter," Tony whispered quietly, visibly distressed by Peter's reaction and angered but broken

expression.

"Stop it," Peter hissed, his gaze turning red as he flicked his head back once. "You'll only make it worse. You always make it worse, okay? News flash for you. Just stop."

"I want to help," Tony insisted as Peter staggered for the couch as his legs gave out on him, his vision starting to swim.

"Now you want to help," Peter seethed, just trying to get away from him as anger boiled in his veins. "Where were you for three months while I was here, falling apart? Where were you? Where were you when May needed help? Where were you when I was on the floor bleeding after a patrol, trying to breathe through a panic attack?"

Tony didn't answer, only hung his head and Peter scoffed, unable to find any compassion in him. He turned away so he didn't have to see the clear guilt on the man's face, even though it was plain as day. That would mean he was wrong. And he wasn't wrong. He knew the pain. Pain made him right.

He staggered around the couch only to find another picture of May standing next to him with his Decathlon trophy for freshman year. Peter reached for it and then recoiled his arm. He had let her die. Tony had- no. He had let her die. He hadn't saved her. The woman who took him in, who was the closest thing he had to a mother, the only family he had when Ben passed away because of him. And now she was gone too.

"May," he raised an eyebrow. "Come on. It's just you and me, remember?"

"I've got a couple years left with you, let me savor them. Are you so eager to get out?" she asked with a laugh.

"No, of course not," he said, grinning. "I'm just...I'm really happy for you May. With everything that's happened...I needed some good news. And this was really good."

"Thank you honey," she said softly, squeezing his hand.

"Now, excuse me, while I finish off my larb," Peter said, immediately digging into his meal that had a spark of flavor once again.

"I larb you," May winked as she finished off her dumplings and they split the sticky rice.

Peter let out a strangled sob and backed up, tripping over the table he had forgotten was there. He should know his apartment, he had lived there since he was little. Cursing himself, Peter almost wanted to hit the ground, but of course he didn't.

Tony caught him effortlessly but as soon as he could lock his legs and stand, he shoved him away, tears streaming down his cheeks. "I don't want your help."

"But you need it," Tony whispered, letting Peter stumble against the wall and put his hands to his head.

The kid's gaze snapped up, fire visible through the tears, "I didn't need you for three months. I was *fine*."

Tony, who knew he wasn't himself, didn't answer. He only nodded and stayed close by while Peter cried, letting out small noises of pain as he pressed his palms to his temples in an attempt to stop the memories of his aunt that were flooding through.

"May, I love you, I'm so so sorry," Peter cried, pressing a fist to his head. "Please no-"

"NO!"

"She's gone." It's empty words. Rain is pouring. His stomach is being knotted and his heart is shattered, tears mixing with the rain that trickles down his cheeks. "She's gone," Peter repeats, more firmly this time like he's trying to resolve it in two words. He knows he can't, but he wishes he could if that would mean the pain goes away.

"I'm sorry May," he whispered. "I couldn't save you. I'm sorry I couldn't save you." He shook his head, angrily rubbing tears from his cheeks. He swore and looked around with a furious expression, "I hate this place. I hate it."

"Peter," Tony shook his head as a warning. He knew better than anyone that you couldn't let your anger corrupt the things that you loved. Peter loved this place, but all of the good memories were turned bad because the kid knew he couldn't experience them anymore. Everything was a reminder of his aunt's death and one of the worst periods in his life and right now, Peter wanted to rip those memories apart, even though he shouldn't. The worst memories that bring you the most pain are the ones you never want to let go of.

Peter turned to him with hate in his eyes and a broken voice, "No! I do. I hate it, I hate everything here. I was weak. I was reckless. I should have taken care of myself and I didn't. Wherever I look, I see her. And now she's gone. And I am still just as broken as I was so maybe I'm the problem. I'm the poison. There's something wrong with *me*."

"Kid, it was my fault. I put you in this position-" Tony says, walking forward, following him because Peter was suddenly moving for the kitchen.

"It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter who's fault it was, because I let her die and right now, I just want to forget it all because maybe that will make it stop," Peter hissed. His mind was divided between pain from losing May and pain from the three months he had lived in absolute torture. Both hurt like hell and rather than decide which one was worse, he just let the anger wash over in waves. Tears were streaming down his face and making his face wobble and sound weak, which he hated.

He pointed, bile in his tone as he spit, "Dishes. May never liked doing them by hand so they always went in the dishwasher and if they weren't clean you put them in again." It was a good memory now turned bad. Swallowing and shaking his head with anger he put up a finger, mocking himself and his attempt to grasp at what happiness he remembered. "No soaking, that was the rule," he laughed halfheartedly, furious with himself. He grabbed the nearest plate and without thinking just

slammed it against the sink. It shattered and fell in the counter and across the kitchen floor. He didn't even blink. Tony did.

Peter turned to the table, "We- we always put the place mats upside down, it was an inside joke. The clock over there was always 5 minutes fast so she wouldn't be late," he motioned without looking, "and- and this is where i snuck coffee whenever she made a pot. She'd keep the water bottles in plain sight so i didn't take one and fill it up but I think she always knew-"

Peter's face fell as he shook his head, "See. See, it's good memories. Now she's gone. And I hate this place for making me remember stupid things like the dishes and the fucking place mats and I just-"

Fists clenched and eyesight tinted red, he slammed his hand down on the edge of the table, breaking part of it off, splinters flying, before he reached in a moment of anger and flung everything on top of it aside. The glass vase on the top shattered as it hit the ground feet away and the place mats slid against the tile. Tony flinched but didn't move.

"I hate it-" Peter made out, his head lowering to his chest as he sobbed. "I miss her," he cried out. Say it. Say it, even though it won't make up for what you have said, say it anyway. He needs to know.

"And I missed you," Peter whispered.

Silence.

Tony slowly and carefully made his way over, worried the boy wasn't done and might flip the table while he was at it. He quickly stepped between him and any more things he could break and put his hand on Peter's shoulder, pulling him closer.

It was the same way he had hugged him when May had died. Peter leaned forward, simply putting his forehead to Tony's chest, trembling. The man limped a bit forward and moved a steady hand to clasp the back of his neck, a thumb rubbing his hair. He tugged the kid as close as he would allow and took a shaky breath, Peter still crying against his chest. The boy's arms stayed limp at his sides, tears dropping to the ground between them. Tony lowered his chin to rest on Peter's head and took a shaky breath.

"I'm sorry," Peter cried weakly; that was the first thing he could painfully wrench from his throat. His hand reached up and fisted Tony's sleeve, winding it in his fingers for comfort.

"Me too, kid," Tony whispered, carding through his hair as gently as he could, looking around at the shattered plate, broken glass, and splintered table. Not only was this all his fault, for leaving Peter, for thinking that it was the right call, but what Peter had just done was his fault too. The boy had gotten that from him, he realized. Peter had gotten that horrible habit from him. This was all his fault.

There's silence and it shows no sign of stopping.

No words are spoken.

Tony has no idea what's going on inside Peter's head but from the kid's body language and tears, he knows it isn't good. It's pain, it's guilt, it's anger, all dropping to the floor through his tears. It's small drops compared to the ocean Peter is holding inside of him. His fists are clenched and he's having trouble breathing and Tony promises he'll stand there as long as it takes, he won't buckle like he did last time. Peter needs this. They both needed this.

Minutes later, and he means minutes, Peter finally speaks, but it's something Tony doesn't expect him to say.

"I would never leave you," the teen sobbed suddenly.

Tony looked down at him in confusion. Then it hit him. What he had said earlier about Peter abandoning him and leaving him for dead. The old feelings came back, making his stomach churn. He bit his lip and forced his breathing to stay steady so that Peter didn't know he was desperately trying to compose himself.

"I know it hurt you. I saw it in your eyes," the boy mumbled guiltily. "You thought I left you for dead to save myself. Despite every time we have said no to that stupid rule. And that was my fault."

"I mean, you knew I wasn't gonna just let you..." Peter seemed deflated, letting out a breath of disbelief. He tried for a weak smile but his voice still cracked as he attempted humor, cocking his head, "Three months did a lot didn't it?"

Tony was hurt by that sentence, and rightly so. How could he think Peter would do this? After everything they had been through? "Yeah," he said harshly. The massive knife that had been in his back suddenly disappeared, but the wound was still there, but it was self inflicted. He couldn't bear to look at the kid.

And now the wound was slowly closing as Peter continued, "I was angry. I knew it would be convincing because I knew I could convince *you*. Even though that was the only way, it still hurt you. I hurt you without meaning to, and I'm sorry. But you need to know," the kid takes a shaky breath, pulling away and staring him right in the eyes. "I am not okay with you dying. In fact, you're not allowed to. I would chose you over anyone and anything. I have lost everyone," his voice trails off and his eyes find May's picture on the table.

Peter smiles at it and the anger washes away. He looks up, "I can't lose you. So don't think, for a second, that I would ever leave you," Peter pleads firmly.

"Okay," Tony responded, his voice cracking. He nodded again, "Okay."

"And I'm not okay with you protecting me," Peter said, a laugh bubbling up in the teen's throat as tears streamed down his cheeks.

Tony chuckled and clasped the back of the boy's head, rubbing his curls as he pulled him back in to a half embrace. "Noted," he whispered.

They stayed there for a while and neither counted it as a hug. But rather a memory. A new one, amidst bad ones that turned good as they found their place in his mind. They both had pasts. They both had gotten hurt, and hurt other people. Maybe that's why MJ was right. They were unable to be ripped apart, they were meant to be at each other's sides because they had found each other even after everything. And they would continue to. Through Ross, through the funeral with the suit that Peter had yet to tell Tony was actually Uncle Ben's tailored to fit him, through returning to school, through even walking out of the door of the apartment. Each would be a new memory. And they would heal the old ones that Peter wished he forget but knew he never could.

Maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

Heyoooooooooooo so this was a sweet one <3 <3

For those of you wondering about Toomes? He's in the end of the next one. Okay a couple things for next chapter to look forward to but in a sad way but good way haha Funeral next chapter, the Board meeting is next chapter, and a nightmare or two is next chapterrrrrrr so we have a lot to cover >:)

hahah I'm so organized NOT but kinda. I have a lot planned and if you have any other things you want to hear comment them please I am down for making this longer than its already gonna be XD so far were at 23 chapters.

So I hope you liked this one, sorry it wasn't like AGHJYFTGHJKG because we needed to do a lil exposition for rn and yall needed a tiny break after last chapter haha I hope you still enjoyed tho and please drop a comment, let me know what you thought, leave kudos all that fun stuff is rly appreciated <3 <3

Next chap innnnnn 5 days ish? Ah its so cool to be back lol

IGHT PEEPS yes im hyper even tho its evening and i havent had sugar dont ask me why. Stay healthy stay tuned and stay....drinking coffee?? And good luck with school or whatever is going on in life because I 100% feel ya XD

I love you all 3000 :)

A Few Good Men

Chapter Summary

Just want to say a quick rest in peace for Chadwick Boseman who was taken way too soon. I found out last night and was completely devastated. He was a great man who was truly a fighter, filming movies through his treatment. He was an amazing actor and so inspirational and he gave us the countless movies that we all loved. Wakanda forever, rest in peace Chadwick you will be missed <3

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyy lovely readers!!!!

Yes the chapter name is after the Tom Cruise movie. Its great XD

Another very important thing: Your comments keep me going 24/7 so TYSM. Just a quick PSA for ya XD

I really like this one teehee i had a blast writing it, especially the boys just getting back to their old selves. I hope you guys are doing GREAT, thank you once again for all your support! If you got hit by that hurricane stay safe i hope it wasn't too bad :(

Anywaysssss im pretty chill XD i only had one cup of coffee today so im not super hyper, but im not falling asleep which is great!! Ok ok a lil summary cuz i think thats what these notes are for but im abusing them by talking about coffee and tings. We got May's funeral, a last RIP where Peter comes to terms with it because I NEED TO STOP CRYING OVER HER DEATH :((((and then probs one of my fav scenes ever to write- I was up until 2 cranking that out because it was just so fun- we have them facing off with the Board. And thennn just some underlying angst and a check up on our favorite baddie, Toomes. And thats as detailed as I'll go. I hope you all enjoy, once again sorry for spelling i am at war with spell check at the moment so wish me luck that i come out victorious- and thank you so much for reading, drink coffee, stay healthy, and idc what fourth thing to put so ill shut up! XD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's hard to tie a tie when your hand shakes. Peter found that out all too soon. He also barely remembered how to do it in the first place. Memories flooded his mind as he relived the wonderful day he slid into the room, exstatic, and asked his aunt for help. It was homecoming, and he was going with his crush, who he didn't know had a psycho dad yet. Thank God he never needed to see Toomes again. Determined not to let that man corrupt his good memories, Peter shoved the darkness aside and focused on the light. That was the day May gave him Ben's suit she had tailored for him, and the day that they both learned how to tie a tie. They had looked up a YouTube video while laughing at the knots they were making and somehow got it right after about ten minutes.

And now, for the life of him, he couldn't remember how to fold it and slide it around the right way. Yet, even if he could, it didn't matter, because he only had one hand to do it. He was still in a cast.

Peter felt tears come to his eyes in frustration, immediately cursing himself for being upset about

something so childish. Not a second after he curled the tie into his fist, he heard Tony behind him ask, "Need help?"

Peter scoffed and looked over his shoulder, blinking tears away, "Thanks, but your arm is broken too."

Tony walks over and smirks, taking the tie from Peter's clenched fist and shredding it to a certain length over his own hand, "I find your lack of faith disturbing."

He started twisting and flipping the tie around his hand into what looked like a form of knot, Peter watching intently. Tony glanced at him and admitted, "When I got back from Afghanistan, my arm was in a sling. I learned a trick or two." He reached up and gently pulled Peter's head forward, letting the loop he had somehow created fall around his neck. Peter raised his chin and Tony chuckled, "Okay, now work with me here. You grab the small end and I got the loop so we can tighten it."

Peter looked down to grab the end he was referring to and Tony tapped his chin up with his finger, grinning triumphantly, "Got ya."

"You're five," Peter blinked in disbelief as he tugged at his end that tucked in the back.

Tony gasped mockingly and winked, "Thanks." They tightened it in sync and Tony shifted it into place, smiling and fixing his cuff before he gave a nod of satisfaction. "There we go, kid. All good."

Peter admired the tie and glanced up at him impressed, muttering, "You gotta teach me that."

Tony ruffled his hair, "I will, don't worry. You have a lot to learn, young padawan."

Peter smiled and then looked at the door, his face falling. He felt his muscles tense and legs lock and he suddenly just wanted to stay right here because if he didn't walk out that door, maybe somehow it wouldn't hurt. Maybe the reality of all this wouldn't slap him in the face like it did every time.

Tony clasped his shoulder, his tone gentle, "It's gonna be okay, kid."

Peter took a shaky breath and looked up at him with a nod, "I know."

It rained the day of Ben's funeral too. Peter remembered that, and it brought back a bad feeling. The clouds were dark, the sky grey, the air cold just like they had been when Peter stood in the similar position a couple years ago. Rain fell from the sky and a small breeze meant that the umbrellas everyone had were pretty much useless. They still held them though, and Peter didn't know why. He wasn't holding one, because it didn't matter much to him, and because he felt calmer in the rain. He spent a majority of the service wondering why but never came to a conclusion. But it provided him with something else to think about other than the fact that he was at his aunt's funeral, so he stuck to it. When his thoughts finally were exhausted, Peter blinked the drops out of his eyes and took a deep shaky breath as he shifted his stance.

Looking around subtly, he saw friends of May, some he knew, some he didn't, and behind them just a massive crowd of people who his aunt had worked with, and people who had their lives changed by her. That just made his heart ache more.

His good hand was in his pocket so that he could conceal it shaking and he returned his gaze to

facing front. There was a hole in the ground, rectangular, with a pile of dirt on the side- a familiar sight. Too familiar. He remembered seeing it for his father, his mother, Ben, and now May. Usually there was some family member next to him to comfort him, to assure him he still had someone left. Usually there was someone else to take the shovel and drop the first bit of dirt on top of the casket later. This time there was not.

At the perfect time, Tony reminded Peter that he was not alone and nudged his side slightly, reminding him that he did have someone standing next to him. The man looked down and met his eyes, whispering, "You okay?" His eyes shone with compassion.

"No," Peter admitted plainly, but his shoulders relaxed a slight bit. If Tony noticed, he didn't show it.

The men in front of them lowered the casket into the ground and it disappeared from Peter's sight, which left him with a horrible taste in his mouth as he winced against his will. His breath was caught in his throat and he swallowed past a thick lump, his stomach churning. Tony straightened as well, tears in the man's eyes.

Sooner than he wanted, someone up front called Peter's name and he sucked in a breath. For a second, he didn't move. Then he felt a hand on his back. It went in one slow circle and then fell. Peter looked up at who had encouraged him and Tony gave him a nod. Peter found his strength and began his slow walk across the wet grass.

He stopped by the edge of the grave and looked down, his attention snapping to the side as someone handed him a shovel. Peter bit his lip and reached out a shaky hand to clasp the handle.

"Would you like to say a few words, Peter?" the man asked gently. Peter's head snapped up and recognized him. He had seen him before from May's work....Andrew, he thinks, one of May's good friends. He gave Peter a comforting smile full of sympathy that didn't do much but was still appreciated.

Peter swallowed and looked at the massive crowd, everyone with identical expressions of grief and sadness. Pity, for Peter was blatant. And he hated it.

Tony was the only one who did not have the saddened look. He stuck out among the solemn face. Instead, he looked like he was going to kill the man for asking him that, but in those split seconds that Peter watched his face, he saw the man glance to the grave and then at Peter, his expression changing into one of sureness. What he was sure about, Peter didn't know, but he soon figured it out. Everyone thought he wouldn't speak, but Tony knew he would.

And Peter realized he knew he was going to speak. He was no longer broken. He had decided that himself. Time to prove it, one step at a time, for himself, and for May. Glancing at Tony in shock, the man's expression was gone and he was simply staring at Peter intently. With a marveled look combined with that of thanks, Peter somehow found his voice.

Andrew stepped back when Peter nodded and he looked up at the crowd of people, shifting his feet, moving his broken arm against his chest. The Avengers were in the back, so they didn't draw attention, and Peter loved them all for that. Tony refused to stand in the back and vowed to kill any press that dared show up, so he was in the front, Pepper beside him. MJ and Ned were here too.

That was encouragement enough, his family there to support him.

"May..." he trailed off immediately, feeling a familiar lump in his throat. He glanced down, tears building in his eyes as he stared at the wood box that was in the massive hole, small drops

splattering across the shiny top. He managed a smile as he remembered his aunt, "Well, I think each and every one of you proves how many lives she touched. And what a great person she was." There were murmurs around and Peter gained the courage to look up, his hand shaking as he pulled down his sleeve to hide it. "What happened to her was-" he shakes his head, biting his cheek. "She didn't deserve that. And I didn't deserve her. Over the past couple years, she became like a mother to me, not just an aunt, and I will never forget her, or what she did for me. No matter what it was, she was there when I needed her, just like she was for everyone else. She wanted to help people. And she did. She never once complained, she always worked hard, and she always kept a smile on her face. I wish that I was able to say goodbye to the person I owe more than almost anyone in the world. I trusted her, I admired her, and I loved her, and I- I always will."

He scratched his nose and nodded, glancing to Tony who gave him a saddened but proud smile. Peter clenched his jaw and gripped the shovel with his good hand, pressing it into the pile of wet dirt. Some people were worried if he could do it with his good arm only; he was still in a cast. He had denied many's help- almost all of the Avengers, Pepper, MJ, and Ned. Tony hadn't offered though, and Peter knew why. He knew he wouldn't accept help, because Peter needed to do this for himself.

He lifted it and his arm strained; even as Spiderman this was a heavy burden, not physically, but mentally and emotionally. He held it over the grave and felt his breath cut short as his sight blurred. It wasn't the rain.

There was complete silence, just the shifting of people's feet, the rain he heard on the ground, his breathing, and the whistle of the wind, and it was loud enough.

His arm was getting tired of holding the shovel over the grave, and it had barely been a second in real time, but in Peter's mind, it had been an eternity. He didn't want to drop it, because that would mean it was real.

But it was real. He had come to terms with it, and there was nothing he could do to change it. May had been the one to encourage him to drop the dirt into Ben's casket with her. If she was here, she would make some light joke and rub his shoulder with a tear filled smile. He missed her and that wouldn't change, but he had to do this.

Bye May.

Defeated, Peter felt a tear escape his eyes as he tilted one side of the shovel, the dirt sliding off and falling onto the casket with a scattered thud. Peter let the shovel drop to his side and Andrew eased it from his grasp before nodding.

Peter then made a beeline for the person who had always given him the strength he needed. Tony was there with a firm hand clasping his shoulder when he took his place. Trying to breathe as his lungs closed in on him, Peter stared at the ground with a clenched fist.

He didn't know how long he stood there after that because suddenly, when he looked up, the grave was filled and people were leaving. His heart sank at the finality of it all and his teeth began to ache as he clenched his jaw. Tony began politely and protectively stepping up and speaking to anyone who attempted to talk to Peter; his gaze was glued to the grave, now covered.

When it was just the Avengers, MJ, and Ned, Peter allowed himself to tear his eyes away from his aunt's resting place.

"You okay, Peter?" Ned said with a small smile, putting out his hand as a gentle offer.

Peter gave him a small smile and nodded, slowly doing their handshake with as much energy as he could. MJ rubbed his good arm and smiled, "Text us if you need us, okay? We'll see you at school whenever you're ready."

"Thanks guys," Peter said quietly, not needing to explain that he wasn't in the mood to talk much. In understanding, his friends waved goodbye, Ned giving him a huge hug, MJ following so she didn't feel left out, but she did it with a smile. They left and soon it was only the Avengers left.

"You want an umbrella, Peter?" Nat offered quietly, coming up and rubbing his arm.

Peter shakes his head, "No, I'm okay." She smiles and gives him a quick hug. He gets condolences from each of the Avengers, but none of them apologize, which he's appreciate. It's just support and encouragement, proof that they would be there for him in a second if he needed them, never going to abandon him again.

Steve puts his hand on his shoulder and gives him a nod and Peter nods back, understanding what he means because the Avengers before him had used up every way to show their support.

Tony scowls and tells his best friend, "Hey, that's our thing." He's referring to them communicating without speaking and Peter breaks into a smile.

Steve smirks and winks at Tony, "It's called the Uncle card. Hang in there, Peter." He waves goodbye before he follows the group of Avengers who are walking back to their cars.

Pepper gives Peter a hug and squeezes his good arm, looking into his eyes and telling, "You're a great kid, I hope you know that. And we will always be here for you."

"Thanks Pepp," Peter says, his voice breaking. She too leaves and Peter turns to face the grave again, a tear sliding down his cheek. Tony is still standing next to him and Peter takes a breath before he makes out, "I'm gonna stay here for a while."

"Okay, kid," Tony nods, putting his hand in his pocket and bouncing on the balls of his feet. He turns and asks, "You want company?"

In all honestly, Peter didn't want the man to leave, but he didn't want to force him to stay either. "You don't have to stay," he said. Then he winced. To some other people that would come across as a plead to leave, and he prayed Tony understood it was quite the contrary.

"I know," Tony says simply and he plants his feet next to him.

Peter's shoulders relax and he sighs quietly with relief. The impact of those words were tremendous, but Peter wasn't able to express it in that moment, which he regrets. And once on that path of regret and guilt, he can't get off. "You know what the worst part is?" he said quietly, shaking his head and biting his cheek. "People say they're sorry and that it never should have happened the way that it did and they're right. It shouldn't of happened, I should have made sure he was dead, I shouldn't have let her go-

"Peter," Tony snapped, immediately cutting him off. It wasn't an angry tone, it was just firm. And that was that.

Peter lowered his chin to his chest, defeated. No one is around, just them, and the rain slows to a stop. He's glad for that; Peter didn't want to damage his Uncle's suit, but he still couldn't figure out why being in the rain set him in a feeling of calm and control.

His gaze remains on the pile of dirt, compact and final. Guilt attempts to drown him but somehow

he stays above the surface, solely because of the man next to him. Peter took a breath and looked over at Tony. "She knew what she was doing," he said firmly with a nod.

The man glanced down at him in an array of emotions, dark hazel eyes locking with his gaze. His arm loops around Peter's shoulder and he squeezed it tightly before letting it drop back to his side. Both of their gazes fell on the grave, which is why they didn't notice when they slipped their hands into their pockets in sync. They stayed there for a minute, and it was when Peter's chest hurt so much that he had to take a massive breath that Tony asked, "You okay?"

"I will be," Peter said firmly and confidently. He had answered two questions because he had been asked two. His chest was just aching, as it should, and Peter had been taking short breaths to calm himself, sometimes holding it in when he felt panic rise in his chest. And as for him being okay in general...he trusted Tony. And that was good enough an answer for him.

"Good," Tony smiles with empathy, not sympathy, and Peter appreciates it.

"As long as we can take care of Ross," Peter adds. He's not joking.

"We will," Tony promises. Peter nods and blinks once, returning his gaze to the grave, glancing over the stone that has his aunt's name carved into it. The stone curved upward into a cross and there was a ribbon tied to it, flowing in what wind there was, fluttering around the rain drops that tried to wear it down. He swallowed down a sob and straightened, taking a shaky breath. Tears welled in his eyes but Peter refused to let them fall. Tony's voice rang out, "It's not a crime, kid."

Before their fight, when Tony knew what he was thinking and said it, Peter didn't even react.

A couple days ago, when Tony knew what he was thinking and said it, Peter's head snapped up in shock.

He thought that was very telling when it didn't even phase him. He didn't wonder if he had said it out loud, or glance up in surprise. "I know," was all he said, but he allowed his voice to crack.

Tony respected the silence that followed, because he understood how it was almost therapeutic for Peter. They stayed there, and Tony didn't need to put his arm around him again, they both knew that. Standing next to him was enough so that's what he did, for about twenty more minutes. It felt like an eternity, but Peter did need an eternity to come to terms with what had just happened, who he was saying goodbye to, and how he was going to handle this next chapter of his life.

He then nodded, took one more glance at the grave and then sucked in his first deep breath that wasn't shaky. He subtly wiped his eye with the back of his hand and said, "Okay."

"Okay," Tony repeated, looking over at him and smiling. He faced the grave and said, "May, you have one hell of a kid."

Peter smiled, choking on a sob but this time the tears that came to his eyes were happy. Tony glanced over at him as the boy said his final goodbyes in silence and in one simple gaze to the person who had been like a mother to him. Then he nodded again and turned around, Tony following him as they made their way across the wet grass to Tony's car that was parked on the side of the street.

Peter shoved him gently as they walked with a smirk on his face and Tony shoved him back.

It was then that he figured out why he didn't want an umbrella. It reminded him of that night on the roof a couple days ago. That was the night when he accepted everything, and when he realized that Tony was the thing that kept him going. When he realized that Tony was his anchor and that if

there was one person left he couldn't lose, it was him. It was then that Peter finally got closure, or at least as much as he was going to get, and had never felt more safe. He had lost one family member, but literally gained another. So he'd keep fighting, as long as Tony was next to him fighting too. *Next to him*. Which led to Ross.

1 Day Later

"Mr. Stark," the director demanded, marveling.

Tony swiveled in his chair, "Yes, dear." Peter snickered in his seat next to him. He had insisted he got to attend, and Tony had made sure no one from the press was present in that room. The Avengers were seated behind and beside them, as well as Pepper. The rest of the hall were filled with various people of high stature, and they were all facing the front board of more government officials, and senators. Just as the man had said. Earlier that day, someone had come to the compound following the request Steve and Rhodey had put forward about a meeting.

The man had entered and was immediately referred to Rhodey, who then led him to the lab, where Peter and Tony were. Tony looked up from his sparking gauntlet and stopped talking once the man entered. Peter poked his head out from behind a suit and frowned.

"Tony, he's here with a letter," Rhodey informs Tony who walks over, tapping a screwdriver against his palm.

"And you are?" Tony asks with a raised eyebrow.

"Priestly," the man says firmly. He holds out an envelope, "This is from the committee."

"Yikes," Tony hisses, looking sideways at Peter.

The kid explains, "He doesn't like to be handed things."

Rhodey takes it instead with a roll of his eyes and Tony nods before shrugging innocently, "It's a peeve of mine. They had to send a letter? They couldn't have just...called? Or, i don't know, told you to tell me that? Instead of wasting trees?"

"Well there are a couple outside if you would like to hug them," the man says smoothly.

Tony laughs and looks around before he says, "I like him."

"If you aren't capable of reading the letter-" the man starts.

"Oh I am," Tony assures him before pointing dramatically and frowning, "It's just that it's so dreadfully far away, all the way...over there, why don't you summarize for me good sir. I think you were going to anyway."

"You are hereby ordered to appear before the Committee dealing with the Board of the Directors regarding your complaint, all terms have been met."

"Oh goody," Tony grins. "Can I see a badge just real quick?"

The man blinks and drawls, "You want to see the badge?"

"I want to see the badge," Peter agrees casually.

"He likes the badge," Rhodey says with a hand on the bridge of his nose.

The man sighs and takes his badge out of his coat pocket, flashing it before returning it to his jacket. "You still like it?"

"Yep, shiny," Tony snaps his fingers, "and what time is this meeting?"

"Nine am," the man says.

Tony nods thoughtfully and gives him a smile and a wave, "Nice, we'll be there by ten. Have a great day." The man pursed his lips but Rhodey cleared his throat and subtly shook his head, leaving Priestly no choice but to turn on his heel and walk out. Tony put up his empty palm and mimicked a firing sound, muttering, "Hate the government. Who wants a blueberry?"

And so, Tony and Peter arrived at 9:45 solely because of the look Pepper gave the both of them and the fact that Tony drove one of his favorite sports cars. After May's funeral, the two had been more...no one knew the right word, but the sarcasm was starting to come back, there were less awkward moments and apologies, and everything was starting to fall back in place. Maybe it was because deep down Peter and Tony knew there was some chance they couldn't win this and didn't want their last week together to be the tense atmosphere that they had learned to call home, but rather getting back into old habits and synchronization to before they fought.

It was welcomed and encouraged by the rest of the Avengers, Pepper, and Peter's friends, glad to see a smile on their faces, along with the mischievous glint they had missed so much. No one wanted it to stop, but they knew that one day was already more than they could have asked for, and if this board meeting didn't go well, then they might be spiraling back down to the starting point.

So far...it was....going.

"I'd appreciate if you took this seriously, since you were the one who called the meeting?" the man said firmly with a twinge of annoyance in his voice. He folded his hands, "If you don't mind, I would like to have your attention just as we are giving you ours."

Tony nodded, "Absolutely, that seems fair."

"Can you explain what happened?" the man sighs.

"Oh yeah, sure. Broke my arm, got stabbed in the same arm, got shot in the chest-" Tony starts but the man puts up his hand. "Oh, the situation we're in, got it. Yeah, silly to think that you care about me."

"Well as you know we went on a little vacation." Tony clears his throat and straightens his suit with his good hand before he points, "Peter got kidnapped. Then I got kidnapped. We were held and tortured for days, and my team got us out using your resources. For once in my life, I would have actually said thank you to you, but then I hear that General Ross, who we all know is a brown-noser, is trying to punish my team for doing their job."

One of the officials raises their hand, "We have already put that aside and denied his request to file whatever document he put in place to restrict your access. General Ross may not be liked by all, but he does contribute. And when his contributions are unwise, we put a stop to them, like we did with that situation."

"You, sir, should get a medal," Tony winked.

Someone else interrupted, "*Some*...have heard that Ross was assaulted when he visited your compound."

"For the record, he came about an hour after I was brought home from the hospital, and don't worry, sir, I've heard the rumors, but just so we're clear, who did he say hit him?" Tony asked innocently.

The man faltered, his gaze flicking over to Peter who put on the best puppy eyed look he could. He licked his lips and made out, "Mr. Parker."

"Me?" Peter gasps incredulously. "Sir, I- this past week as been a lot for me. My arm is broken, it's a wonder I'm not paralyzed from the shocks-" Peter takes a second to compose himself and Tony smirks beneath his hand.

"Peter, you're gonna need to really, like-" Tony waves his hands. "Overdo this."

"Overdo what? Me getting kidnapped and tortured? It's bad as it is," Peter smirks.

"Yeah...but you're...like me," Tony sighs.

Peter blinks, "And?"

"They don't like me," Tony explains.

"So...don't be like you?" Peter says slowly.

"Yes!" Tony nods, rubbing chin, "Make them feel awful for doing this to a poor innocent kid, you know? Can you do that? Do puppy eyes or something. We can do a dry run if you need to practice."

"You're making it sound like I can't act," Peter drawls, crossing his arms before forgetting he's in a cast. It looks stupid and he lowers his hand to his side with a frown.

"I'm not saying that," Tony chuckles. He had turned away before the whole crossing arms fiasco.

They fall into silence, going back to work and then Tony bites his lip. He's gonna have to mention May. Ever since they got into the car after the funeral Peter has seemed better about it, like a weight has been lifted, but that still won't make it hurt any less when someone mention's his aunt's death. He feels like he ask for permission-

"I know," Peter says suddenly. "It's okay."

Tony nods, rubbing his thumb nervously on the screwdriver he was holding before he clenches it in his fist, reaching and ruffling the teen's hair as he walks by, "Okay, kid."

"The fact that he would accuse me of punching him- or even being *able to* punch someone, to inflict pain when I had been ruthlessly interrogated for days...in the state I'm in, the doctor's say I'm lucky to be alive."

Natasha leans forward into her mic and says simply, "For the record, we were all witnesses. We saw nothing." She nods firmly.

"What she said," Clint says, leaning over her into the mic. He gets punched in the chest and glares, mouthing *what?!*

There's really no counter to make after that. The man who had brought up the accusation looks flustered and he stutters to cover his blunder, "I- I immediately regret mentioning it. Mr. Parker, I would also like to say that we collectively are very sorry for your loss."

Peter nods slowly and says with as much fake appreciation as he can, "Thanks."

"Look," Tony says firmly, getting the men's attention with his gentle tone. "The kid lost his aunt. He's been through enough. On May Parker's will, the legal guardian she selected for Peter was me. Ross is just pissed off that we turned down his stupid deal-" he suddenly points, "which you all admitted was stupid for the record- if anyone is writing all this down- and now he wants to get back at us, at me, and is taking it out on the kid."

"As corrupted as his motivations were, Stark," the director admits slowly, adjusting his glasses that keep sliding down his nose, "the General has a point."

Tony cursed under his breath but forced a smile, "And that's what we're here to talk about, because you're gonna twist this into why I'm unfit to parent because I'm a danger to society, is that it? You're starting to sound like Ross, why don't you take his side?" The men at the panel exchange looks and Tony rolls his eyes before he waves his hand, "Well go on then, have at it."

"I will return to our original question that we asked you years ago. Do you or do you not possess a specialized weapon?"

Tony rubs a hand over his face and sighs, "And like I said before, I do not. And again, like I said before, it depends on how you define the word weapon. And then you said," Tony pretends like he's checking a script, "the Iron Man weapon. Which is not what it is."

"Remind me what you *think* it is?" the man drawls, not amused.

"It's a high-tech prosthesis," Tony says. "Once again, if you would like to engage in a discussion as to whether or not your priority is actually the well-being of the American citizen-"

"Mr. Stark," the man snaps.

"And if I remember correctly," Tony continues. "You wanted me to turn over the suit and turn over myself, which I correctly defined as tantamount to prostitution. And then I correctly assumed you were no expert in prostitution because of course, you're a Senator. I'm sure nothing has changed. Oh and that was when you, honey," he turns. "gave me a look as if I was being immature," Tony said happily, trying to find Pepper's glare from where she was seated. He chuckled as he locked eyes with her and saw her frown, "Oh, there it is again."

"*Mister Stark*," the man repeated louder.

"The problem here, sir, is that I'm kind of like a vigilante," Tony says, regaining the floor as he turned back to face front. He moves his hand around, "We're all kind of like vigilantes here, but I was the first one. And you still resent me because I don't conform to a specific branch of government, even though, it is in the military's best interests to actually fold me into the existing chain of command. And I will still accept Secretary of Defense if you ask nicely," Tony shrugged, getting a couple chuckles. "But you can't, because you don't like me very much."

Then his gaze softens and he lowers his voice, a few of the men leaning forward, recognizing the change of tone. "Don't worry, it doesn't hurt my feelings, I understand our love hate relationship, but that does not mean you can sit by while this kid who has lost everything and been through more than a sixteen year old should ever be put through, is thrown carelessly into one of your precious government organizations. I won't let that happen. So that's what we need to be discussing, not the sound my blaster makes when I sink a beam through an alien coming to attack Earth."

There's a different atmosphere in the room and no one wants to talk after that. Finally the director

does, "We understand your concern, Stark, we do."

"So then call him off," Tony insists. "Ross is doing this just to get under my skin and no other reason. All I ask is you require this to be settled in a conference room with lawyers and refuse any offer he presents to take this public, that's it."

The director puts up his hand, and Tony actually quiets. No one has seen him do that before, even the man who had raised his arm looks surprised and that simple reaction speaks louder than any words Tony had spoken. He was backing down for Peter's sake, and Peter alone, and it showed.

"I am not about to get into whether or not the Iron Man suit is the reason for you being unfit to take legal responsibility. Peter Parker has been your intern for over two years now, correct?" Tony and Peter both nod. "So he's already had access to the suits I presume, given his technology, mechanics, and engineering skills. That may be what Ross is worried about, but I have since washed my hands of that matter."

Peter dares to smile, and he immediately regrets it.

"What we do want to shed light on is the atmosphere into which Peter would be entering granted we allow you and Ross to settle this dispute and you do take legal custody."

Peter frowns, and so does Tony. The man chuckles nervously and asks, "What- what do you mean?"

"Have you been diagnosed by or at least gotten an appointment with a therapist since the incident with the ten rings?" the man asked.

Out of all the things that anyone thought they would ask, that was not it. There were a couple gasps and swears which caused the panel of men to look warily at the furious they were given from the fellow Avengers and Pepper. Then there was silence.

Peter was the one who shattered it with a seething, "How dare-"

"Pete," Tony hissed harshly, reaching his good hand over to clamp down on Peter's wrist as he shot out of his chair. Peter's fiery gaze met with his as Tony coked his head slightly. The boy instantly calmed at the broken look in Tony's eyes and slowly took his seat as Tony turned to the board.

His voice was weaker, "Pardon?"

"We're not trying to hit you when you're down," one of the officials said slowly.

"Besides the fact that that's exactly what you're doing, continue?" Tony said furiously.

"Mr. Stark you can honestly tell us that you were not affected in the events that took place on-"

Tony's hand clenched and he stared at the table in front of him, speaking through gritted teeth, "Are you insane? Of course I was affected-"

"You're proving our point," the man says in response.

"What point?" Tony splutters. "You haven't made a point you've just danced around it for a while expecting me to fill in the blanks as to what you're insinuating!"

"And as much as it pains me to say this," the director says weakly, "do you think it's wise to introduce or rather increase Peter to that kind of-"

"You're kidding," Rhodey swears in disbelief when the man puts words to his accusations.

"It's a legitimate concern," one of the senators says sadly.

"No," Steve seethes, defending his friend who has never looked so deflated in his life. "It's not."

"If Mr. Stark's well being affects Mr. Parker in any way we must take that into account. Studies have shown how those environments can way on children-"

"You are unbelievable," Natasha swears in disgust, leaning back in her chair.

"You do hear yourself?" Clint asks, as if just to make sure.

It goes back and forth, the screaming- the offense, the defense. The only person who doesn't speak is Tony. He's staring in disbelief, guilt, and...Peter doesn't want to stand by while he has that broken look on his face. The yelling gets louder, to the point where almost the entire room is involved and it's not even distinguishable anymore, the mess of words blends together and splatters everywhere. It's starting to make Peter's ears ring but he can't tear his eyes from Tony.

The noise finally gets too loud.

Someone breaks the silence.

"Everybody shut up!"

Everybody does shut up. Immediately. And they stare at the teen who is on his feet, eyes flashing, and Tony knows he can't stop him this time. The boy's chair rattled from being shoved back by serious force.

Peter storms to the front of the room and hisses, "I was just kidnapped and tortured for days and then my aunt was killed while *on the phone* with me. Do you have any idea how that feels? No, you don't. The worst part was some of the torture was actually causing *him* pain," Peter points to Tony who sits up straighter and locks eyes with him. Peter shrugs, his voice quieter than usual as he whispers, "Because they knew how to get to me. They knew he has been more like a father to me than anyone has for-"

Peter trails off and Tony swallows, his eyes shining. Peter looks down and shakes his head, turning back to the panel, "Do you know what it feels like to have someone you love, hurt because of you?"

He bites his lip and admits angrily, "I *hope* you don't. Because it is truly the worst feeling in the world. And I don't want your fake sympathy, I want you to actually listen *for once*." No one interjected.

"We've had our issues," he admits with a small half-hearted chuckle. "But we've always found our way back and in the worst times of my life, there was one person I could count on and he is sitting right there in that chair," Peter pointed behind him to Tony without turning. He knew what look would be on the man's face. His chest heated and Peter refused to back down. He hadn't stood up to defend himself, he stood up to defend Tony; it was about time someone did. But Tony knew why he had stood up, and he knew Peter could imagine the look he had on his face so he didn't expect the kid to turn around. Instead the teen wanted to stare down the men who dared say a word bad about him.

"He's not perfect, neither am I, neither are you, so how about you self reflect and then get back to us," Peter swore. "I have nightmares, panic attacks, forms of PTSD, and probably every single other mental issue that could possibly come as a result of what I've been through. And so does he.

But I didn't really have a choice with mine. He could easily put the suit aside and put the pain away and retire but he doesn't. For your sake. He puts on that suit and fights for you, saves your bacon day in and day out, and now you're punishing him for it?" Peter swears in disbelief, laughing with no humor. No one dares cross him, not with the look on his face.

"He's saved the world," Peter exclaims, glaring daggers at every single official, director, and senator. "And you're ragging on him for the pain that he has because of his job that he chooses to do for you!" Peter yells. He composes himself and raises his fiery gaze. Like Tony's, Peter's calm voice is almost more dangerous and intimidating than when he is yelling.

"I will say this once and only once," he says quietly through his teeth. Some people shift in their chair uncomfortably. "Stop degrading him like he's doing something wrong by being human. Because he's always been human even if you all couldn't see that because you're busy blurring your vision with fake news and twisted headlines."

There's a second of silence that Peter takes as a victory.

"And if that wasn't enough for you, you'd be breaking the law," Peter says confidently, taking back some of the tension in the room as he smiles widely.

One of the officials has the balls to say, "Do tell, Mr. Parker."

"I will, but first I suggest you get that stick removed," Peter says innocently, gesturing to him. "It must be very uncomfortable sitting in that chair with that big of a-

"Mr. Parker," the senator warns, looking around in distaste at the chuckles that followed the previous sentence.

"Right," Peter gives him a fake smile. He waves his hand in thought, "Where was I? Oh. Grounds for Terminating Parental Rights. And before you get your pants in a knot, Tony is my father," he says firmly. In that instance, it was understood as legally, but the man behind him sat straighter at that, hearing the underlying tone of truth.

"I was placed under his legal guardianship the minute the will was read. Now that that's agreed, the law which pertains to this certain dispute clearly states that the accuser must provide clear and convincing evidence that one of the grounds exists. What grounds you say?" Peter questions mockingly and a few of the Avengers smirked. The kid was just a younger version of Tony. His entire speech was improvised, well spoken, comedic and jabbing at the same time. Even the boy's movements were scarily accurate to the man sitting behind him with a proud smile on his face.

"Well I'm glad you asked," Peter smiled. "The list contains things that Tony has never done or ever will do. Lucky for you, your stupid jab about mental state is one of them. But it appears we're in the same boat, Tony and I. It's helping me cope, and who are you to say otherwise? You honestly can't comprehend, you can't get it through your thick skulls that going through something with someone that shares your pain is a good thing?"

"That is not what we said," the man says slowly, as if just for the record.

"You know maybe you just don't have someone to talk to," Peter asks calmly, pouting out his lower lip. "How have you been feeling lately? Unappreciated?"

Steve looks over at Tony for about the fifth time, happily seeing a smirk of pride on the man's lips with no signs of fading.

"Mr. Parker, my mental state is none of your business," the director snaps, his eyes flashing.

Peter grins, "Oh sorry, I didn't realize you could dish it but not take it. I mean, you have no problem diving into Tony's personal life."

Rhodey covers his mouth with his hand. Steve grins and claps twice, raising his eyebrows at the people who look at him with distaste. Natasha smirks with her arms crossed. Clint jumps a bit in his seat and gasps audibly, and Natasha doesn't punch him for his reaction this time. The entire room freezes, recognizing the parallel Peter had just brilliantly made. The man stutters to recover but Peter puts up his hand apologetically, "You're right, it's not my business. Just like what Tony goes through is none of yours. But at least he has a handful of traumatic experiences that correspond with it. Your problem is your wife just doesn't like you."

"*Mr. Parker,*" the man yells in utter rage.

At that, people all explode across the room and Peter can't help but smirk too, imagining Tony's proud smile he no doubt has on his face behind him. The man does. He's staring in awe at the kid who is just perfecting his craft in front of him, taking what Tony has taught him with his own spin. If he squinted, it was almost like he was watching himself argue against the director and there was honestly no better feeling. Even the expressions Peter was displaying mimicked his own.

"I'd have you know that me and my spouse are perfectly fine-" the director says through his teeth, cheeks flushed red.

"Great!" Peter exclaims, stopping him there. "No, seriously, that's great," he repeats. Everyone waits. The man seems uneasy, and he has every right to be. Peter continues with a shrug, "Almost like you were defending someone you care about in a rash manner that could make some people worried about your stability. Glad to know that's not a crime, because it's not. It's called being human," Peter said, his eyes flashing. "You are human, sir, despite you desperately trying to cover that part up." The director resorts into silence again and once again the room stops at the comparison this sixteen year old kid has flawlessly created.

Peter takes a deep breath and shakes his head as he nods over his shoulder, "You paint him in such a bad light, and while you're not as bad as Ross, you aren't much better. You look at Tony and see a threat and that's wrong. I see nothing but a man who has saved my life and will continue to save my life and is the best person to help me get back to somewhat normal after what happened to me and him- an incident which you're playing down right now."

The director looks around and stutters, "Mr. Parker we are not suggesting that what you went through wasn't-"

"Which leads me to you breaking the law if you go through with this," Peter says happily cutting him off without a care in the world. "The termination has to be in the child's best interest. I'm the child. I say I want to stay. I say it is in my best interests and I assure you in the court of law if you allow this to go public, they will hold that statement to very high standards."

The man shifts in his chair and looks around but no one is offering support. Peter's eyes flash and he tells them all simply, "You will be depicted as the corrupted power hungry politicians you are, trying to tear a teen from the closest thing to family he has left. That's what's already happening, but I would think you would prefer if that wasn't on the front page of the Daily Bugle."

It's the next sentence that sets people on the edge of their seats. They had seen the fire from Tony Stark's eyes many times before, and here it was again, but from the teen in front of them. His voice is calm but promising and it sends chills down everyone's spines. "If you send us into a public court I will destroy you. I will get on the witness stand and destroy every single one of you."

Peter is about to walk away but he decides to make one more point. His lip curls and he shakes his head. "And the kicker is it's not even for what you're doing to me," he admits. "It's what you're doing to him." He faces panel directly and speaks one last time, his voice quiet. "And if that doesn't speak volumes, I don't know what will."

Peter finally stops. He looks around and sees everyone staring at him. He clears his throat and straightens his suit, managing a cocky smile, "Nothing further." Then he turns around and walks back to his seat, finding Tony's gaze. The man's eyes shine with pride and he cracks a smile, causing Peter to as well.

He takes a seat without a word and Tony looks over at him with so many emotions conveyed through his gaze. It's almost as if he's trying to find the right words to say. What comes out is a sincere, "Thanks, kid."

Peter shakes his head immediately, "You never need to say that to me."

"Normal kids just say you're welcome," Tony tells him and Peter smirks. The man ruffles his hair and they turn and move their chairs closer to the table at the same time before folding their hands in sync as well. The panel then really only has one option.

The man's grip was tight on his chin and Peter maintained his glare, at least until Damian shoved his face away and spun, slamming his elbow across Tony's jaw. Every fiber in Peter's body wanted to cry out but he clamped his mouth shut and bit his tongue.

Tony fell with a groan, landing on his side and blinking, reeling from the hit. Peter adjusted his footing as Damian grabbed the man on the floor by the collar and yanked him to his feet, causing Tony to swear in pain. Peter's eyes flicked to the side at a small flash and Tony's struggling was instantly halted at the prick of a shining knife against his throat.

Keeping his gaze locked with Peter's in a taunting fashion, Damian twirled the knife expertly between his fingers, landing to rest against Tony's cheek.

"I know what you're doing," Peter said weakly.

"Oh really?" Damian asked innocently. Without warning, he split skin, blood spilling down Tony's cheek as he cut him. He nicked his lip before he expertly made a small cut on Tony's jaw. Tony had been clenching his teeth together hard but that last cut resulted in a sharp exhale, sending waves of heat through Peter's chest.

"Stop it," he pleaded in fury.

Damian didn't stop. Instead he slammed the butt of the knife down on the back of Tony's head and the man let out a sound of pain, squeezing his eyes shut as he dropped to his knees, his head ducking down to protect himself-

Peter shot up in his bed, breathing hard. His sheets were twisted around his legs and Peter quickly kicked them off, pulling himself into a sitting position and moving to lean against the back of his wall, knees brought to his chest.

Breathe. Like you do every time. Just one breath and then another one.

The nightmares came like he knew they would. Peter frowned this time as he rubbed a hand over his head; this hadn't even been a bad one. Tony had merely gotten cut but it was still enough to

send him shooting up in bed, terrified and scarred.

His ears were ringing and Peter clasped a hand against one, cursing his cast that he couldn't wait to get off. That didn't help the ringing, and Peter felt his heart beating faster when he tried to calm himself down. Before the room started spinning, he squeezed his eyes shut and let out a shaky exhale, tears building up behind his closed eyelids in frustration.

When he opened them they spilled down his cheeks and he rubbed them furiously, gripping his blanket with white knuckles as he tried to ground himself. He couldn't. Peter stared at the door, chewing on his lip and flinching as he was plagued with memories of Tony being hurt because of him.

He held it in for as long as he could but the dam broke when he was reminded of the sound Tony made after the gun rang out. Peter threw his covers aside and scrambled for his door, yanking it open and starting down the hall to Tony's room. He'd just make sure he was okay and then maybe, just maybe, he would be able to go back to sleep or at least get closure. Then Peter stopped, turned around after a moment of thought, and headed the other way. He walked down the stairs to the lower level and made his way down the hallway, shoving flashbacks further into the back of his mind, pressure building in his head.

Peter walked faster, finally making it to the lab and sure enough Tony was there, head in his arm at the lab table, asleep. Peter's shoulders relaxed and he breathed a sigh of relief, about to walk back upstairs when he heard a small sound that reminded him too much of the many times he had heard the man in pain over the past week.

He turned and frowned, walking quietly down the steps and approaching him. Peter then cursed himself. Tony's eyes were screwed up right and behind a box his clenched fist as visible, knuckles white as his arm shook. He was trembling and that was when Peter heard him say, "Don't-"

"Peter, I can't wake him." That was FRIDAY, the A.I.'s voice showing concern.

"I'll kill you, Damian," Tony whimpered and Peter's heart clenched. "No- you hear me- no- don't touch the kid-"

Peter gently reached out, pain in his eyes, and he laid his hand on Tony's shoulder. The man flinched at his touch and let out a sound that broke Peter's heart. But then, Peter realized, Tony wasn't breathing. He was trying to take in air and failing, hand slowly losing his clench. And he wasn't waking up.

"Tony," Peter said firmly, shaking his shoulder. Nothing. He wouldn't wake up. "Tony!" he yelled, giving him a hard shove. Still nothing. "Tony, *wake up!*"

The man's eyes flew open and he sucked in a deep breath, filling his lungs. His hands grasped the table and he nearly fell off his chair but then...then his eyes fell on Peter, who was shocked to see that it didn't look like Tony was fully with him yet.

Before he could even say anything else, the man's eyes widened and he pulled Peter into his chest with his good arm, letting out a yell. Peter fell into his shoulder and saw him whip his arm around, a blaster folding around his open palm as he dropped to the floor, taking Peter with him. Even with whatever he was seeing, Tony still made sure to cradle Peter's broken arm against his chest as they hit the ground. Tony's eyes were wide and scared, and he was breathing hard. His palm was out, a blast already heating up from the center of the gauntlet as he scanned the room, holding Peter tightly against his chest with his bad arm.

Then his eyes adjusted and lost their glossed look and Tony sucked in a breath, looking around and lowering his arm with a shaky exhale as he realized where he was. Peter gently pulled away a second later, eyeing him nervously and Tony met his eyes. "Hey," he said awkwardly, shaking off the blaster that flew back to its place on the counter.

"How's your bullet wound after that," Peter said with a small smirk, referring to the fall they had both taken.

"Really really painful, thanks for asking," Tony admitted with a wince, clasping his hand over his chest and squeezing his eyes shut.

"I'll get you some Tylenol." Peter hauled himself upright and stuck out his good arm, helping Tony to his feet and steadying him. Tony gave him a pat on his shoulder and ran a hand through his hair.

He then beelined for the screwdriver he had apparently been using to fix a connector, asking casually, "What are you doing up?"

Peter webbed the tool and it flew out of Tony's reaching grasp and into his own hand. Peter set it down on the table and shook his head, "How about you tell me what just happened?"

"I wiggled out, that's it. You weren't supposed to see that," he admitted, as if embarrassed Peter saw him breaking after everything they had been through. Embarrassed that Peter got yet another example of Tony's knee-jerk response being to protect him at all costs. "You didn't get hurt just now, did you?" Tony asked with concern.

Peter looked at him incredulously, his jaw nearly dropping. "No, Tony," he said in exasperation. How could he have been so blind to this? To think that Tony wasn't having nightmares like he was, worse ones by the looks of it. Yet he was still trying to focus on Peter, because he mattered more to him than himself.

"I know every word you said over those past couple days and not once did you say what you just did," Peter said quietly. Tony's gaze flicked up to him, confirming Peter's theory. "What am I missing?" he pried gently. "What did you relive just now?"

Tony ran a hand over his face and gave him a look, "There's no chance you'll drop this and just go to bed, right? And forget about all this?"

"Nope," Peter agreed.

The man sank down into a chair with a wince, and a cold fist clenched Peter's heart as he curled his hand to stop it from shaking. It took Tony a second, but he finally spoke, his voice weaker than Peter had heard in a while. "When Damian took me for waterboarding, he made up these rules. He'd stop if I told him to, but the minute I begged him, he would send someone in to the room you were in. To beat you up- I don't know-" Tony shook his head, his voice cracking.

"He didn't even ask you anything," Peter realized in anger. "You said he wanted nuclear codes."

"Yeah, not a single question," Tony muttered. "Not one." Peter could see the fury in his eyes, as well as the tears. His voice cracked as he swore, "He'd hold me down longer and longer each time, telling me to ask him to stop and I never did because I didn't want them to hurt you, kid." Tony shook his head, looking down. "And it pissed him off," he swore angrily, starting to shake. "It pissed him off to the point where he sent someone in anyway." All the fight had drained from him and he choked out the last sentence, "Because I couldn't figure out a way to keep him from hurting you."

Peter straightened, his mouth dry when he tried to form words.

"Tony," was all he could get out and even that was soft. Waterboarding was bad enough. Peter knew he was stubborn enough to take any amount of pain to keep him safe, but to go through all that and have it be for nothing was something Peter couldn't relate to. He pictured the haunting look that Tony had in his eyes when he came back in and the pain he saw him swallow. He thought it was just from the torture, but turns out it had another origin.

"Pete, it was my fault," Tony whispered, finally making eye contact with him.

"And letting you get stabbed was mine!" Peter countered angrily.

"That's different," Tony mumbled.

"No, it's not!" Peter blurted out, standing up. "It's time for you to accept the fact that I would do just as much for you as you do for me. I mean, Tony, you sacrifice everything for me, whenever you get the opportunity. It's become your thing now! You don't think I wouldn't do the same?" he demands.

"I know you would," Tony says quietly.

"So now we're back to the problem, you accepting the fact that this is a two way street!" Peter concluded firmly.

Tony's voice was weak and he made out, "I don't want to fight."

Peter faltered. He trailed off with his next sentence and stared at the man in front of him. "Neither do I," he admitted quietly and he sank back down into the seat next to him.

Peter reached and grabbed the screwdriver that he had placed down and offered it to Tony. The man gave him a weak smile and took it.

Klaue flexed the fingers on his metal arm and trudged up the stairs to his office. He twisted the handle and flicked his lights on, his gaze casually scanning his room. He tossed his coat to the floor before going over to his desk and shuffling through his papers.

The phone rang and he answered, "Yeah? Well then put it on yours. I don't have time for this. Get the job done or you're fired, how's that for an ultimatum? I have friends who have friends, you should try it sometime. That works. See, now we're doing business. Just get the shipment here, I really don't care how."

He sighed in annoyance and circled around to his chair, sinking down, keeping his eyes to the floor while he subtly reached under his desk where he kept his gun. His face fell when he hit the empty holder and he tensed.

"Don't bother."

Klaue looked up to the man who had been waiting in the dark shadows of the corner. His gun was the only thing positioned out of the darkness and it was leveled at his heart. He smiled and crossed his feet on top of the desk. "You could have made an appointment."

"That would have been risky. I'm not sure you would have accepted my company."

Klaue (SORRY TYPO MY STUPID AUTOCORRECT WORKED FOR ONLY THAT WORD AND CHANGED IT) who is not our bro haha
theyll be up to something but dissapear for a while as we focus on more pressing issues

More ironad to come, school, lab, avengers, etc etc i have a lot planned so strap in my readers weve got a rough ride haha

Thank you for reading, please pleaseee leave a comment, tell me what you think and thank you for all of your support it rly means the world. also were at like 28 k??? thats crazy???? thank you????

Ok stay healthy, stay tuned, and drink coffee <3 in healthy amounts.

I love you 3000 <3

The Enemies Go Down With Their Ships

Chapter Notes

HI LOVELY READERS!!!!!!!!!! Glad to be here, glad you're here, glad- idk what else XD

Yes i became a lawyer for this.

Oh God its september??? Sheesh.

Holy crap its afternoon??? Where did the day go...

ok let me actually get into this beginning note instead of sprouting random facts cuz that is boring

AND I FIXED MY SPELLCHECK LETS GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO- I am terribly sorry for all that, I went back and corrected all the squiggly lines good lord thank you for sticking with me XD

But were good now!! And like ive mentioned to a couple of you.....this may be the first chapter that doesnt bring yall to tears??? Hopefully?? At this point I cant promise, but hey, miracles do happen so strap in for the slightly happy side but still stressful side of the rollercoaster >:)

This is the ultimate showdown for Ross and boom suddenly Peter wants to go back to school and some lab stufffff

Happy times <3

I hope you guys are doing well, once again, thank you for all of your support, we're nearing 30k which is absolutely INSANE and I cannot thank you enough that is so crazy to me.

So good luck with school everyone and life and just anything you have coming up or going on during this crazy time and I hope this chapter can bring you a little happiness if youre having an icky day or make it better haha

Read on you awesome peeps!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

11 AM

General Thunderbolt Ross sat on one side of the table with his lawyer. One of the top lawyers in the entire state of New York sat with Tony, Steve, Rhodey, Nat, Clint, and Peter sat on the opposite side- a very intimidating team. Ross' men, the same men who had come before, were at the door, hands clasped in front of him. There was a representative of the board off to the side, the official mediator who was in charge of reporting back to the board. He was watching and shifting in his seat, loosening his tie at the tenseness which was rippling off the two sides of the table. The air was definitely thin.

Tony was first to speak, and he directed his attention to his enemy with a fake smile and a loathing tone, "Nice lawyer you got there."

Ross' eyes flashed and he curled his fists, smiling back just as tensely, "Well none of the firms around here would take my case. I wonder why."

"So do I," Tony agreed with a frown. He rapped his knuckles on the table and looked at the very scared young man clutching his briefcase like it was his flotation device and he was drowning. He

raised his eyebrow, "Do you know who I am? Of course you do. But just in case, I'll say my name again. Tony Stark. That's Captain America, Black Widow, War Machine-

"Iron Patriot," Rhodey corrected.

"No, that name sucks," Tony snorts leaning back in his chair, eyes trained on the shaking (barely) adult who looked like he just graduated from Harvard Law. He continued, "And Hawkeye. Say hello guys." The Avengers gave their silent greetings and the man watching them gulped and sank lower in his chair. "Also a personal friend of mine, Roger Elson, one of the best attorneys in the business. He's from a little place called Nelson and Murdock, I'm sure you've heard of it," Tony smiles confidently. Roger straightens his suit and gives a little wave.

Ross' lawyer went completely pale and if Tony hadn't been so set on settling this once and for all, he possibly would have felt bad. But right now he didn't. He gave the young adult a smile instead. "And this," he put his hand on the shoulder of the boy next to him. "Is Peter Parker. You're defending someone who wants to rip this kid, a kid I have sworn to protect, who I took a bullet for, out of his home and put him in some random government facility. He's probably only 6 years younger than you i'd say-

"Enough, this is corrupting the ADR," Ross said angrily.

Natasha whistled and stuck out her hand, her feet up on the table, "I would leave the fancy talk to your lawyer, Ross. Let's all act appropriate."

"ADR?" Peter asked quietly, leaning over to Tony in question.

"A Desperate Ross," Tony whispered back.

"Alternative Dispute Resolution!" Ross spluttered in absolute fury, his fists already curling. Clint makes a blowing up nose with his mouth, snickering. Ross' gaze is centered on Tony and he jabs his finger towards him out of spite, "Can't we sue him for that?"

"No, Ross, you can't sue me for hurting your feelings," Tony drawled with a roll of his eyes before he pointed to the phone which was at the center of the table. "Your mother was just on line two though, we had a lovely chat," Tony grinned. "Why don't you go cry to her?"

"Sir," the lawyer at Ross' side finally speaks, his voice weak as he tries to reprimand Tony.

"There is no legal stance in which Tony Stark's verbal actions jeopardizes him in anyway. Playground insults are not against the law, I would like that on the official record, please. If your client cannot handle that, then I suggest we settle this quickly," Roger says calmly, nodding at the man at the end of the table who gave him a wide eyed look and started typing. Roger gave his much younger opponent a smile.

Ross looked like he was about to blow his top. He glared at his attorney, expecting him to say something, but he never did. Infuriated, he turned back to Tony and Peter who both shrugged in unison, sank back into their chairs, and crossed their arms with cocky grins.

10:30 AM

"Is this legal?" Peter asks, slowly, his gaze flicking to Tony.

"Some parts yes, some parts no," Tony says slowly as he tapped into the security feed from a

couple days ago, selecting the room and time before highlighting it and sending it off to the computer Clint was clicking around on.

"Got it!" Hawkeye called, giving him a thumbs up, spinning in his chair before getting to work. "You know this editing software was super expensive, this better work."

"So we're just gonna ignore the no parts," Tony finished to Peter, smiling as he pushed his chair away from the computer with a triumphant sound effect.

"Great," Peter sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. There were traces of a smile though.

"Exactly my thoughts," Tony winked, ruffling his hair as he rolls his chair by.

Natasha walked back in with a smirk on her face and held up her cell phone before she tucked it into her pocket, "Board is ready. I filled them in. They know the time and I'm already got them patched. They're skeptical, but they're willing to take the chance."

Rhodey walked by, stopping by Peter and Tony. He grinned with a shrug, "I mean, we said we'd play dirty."

"It's Tony, what did you expect, kid? That he says some playground insults and calls it a day?" Steve asks with a smirk from one of the face time calls they had running on the screen, stepping down off the ladder as he adjusted the bookcase in the conference room.

"That's the part that's not legal," Peter points to the screen and Cap gives him a thumbs up.

"Yeah, not really," Cap snorts.

Tony made a face, "There's some fine print. We're swimming in the grey area? With a lot of boats and oil rigs in the way so people just give up if they want to try and get to us."

Peter blinks and looks around at the Avengers who, at this point in their friendship with Tony, are unphased. Steve speaks again through the video call, "Alright heading back. Peter, you're now gonna get special access to a bunch of the behind the scenes stuff Tony does illegally. He's not all rainbows and unicorns."

"I know that," Peter scoffs.

"You act like I do this for a living," Tony gasps at Steve, offended. Steve shuts off the call as he heads back to the lab. Natasha looks at him from across the room and raises an eyebrow. Tony shrugs in surrender and admits, "Ok, so I do this for a living. But it's for a good cause."

"I'll ask the one question that needs to be asked. Are you positive you can get him to crack?" Rhodey says firmly, walking over and leaning against the counter next to his friend.

Tony scoffed and casually slumped in his chair, spinning it with his good leg, "Can I get him to crack?" he repeats in disbelief, frowning at the question. "It's Ross. Of course I can get him to crack. He charged me the first time."

"And if he doesn't, I can definitely make him," Peter grinned, hopping up on the counter as well next to Rhodey, swinging his legs.

Tony blinked at the two of them and motioned to the empty chairs since they decided the counter was more comfortable, "You know I can just throw these away if-"

"And what's your code word again?" Rhodey asks, scratching his neck in thought, his eyes darting as he tries to remember.

Tony shoots him a look, "I hope you're joking. We've been over this. First off, it's a *go* word, because it means plan is in go to town mode."

"That's not what that means," Clint calls from the computer.

"Shut up, Barton," Tony shouts back aimlessly. "And second, it's Walk All Over You. It's brilliant on my part. Not only is it AC/DC, but I know I can fit it in conversation," he said firmly, wiggling his eyebrows.

Peter snickered, "Oh my gosh, and then a trip to Disneyland, too?" Tony shoots him a look.

"Buy me a ticket!" Clint shouts.

"No!" Tony yells back.

"Tony, I'm serious. Are you gonna be able to take it?" Rhodey asked firmly, looking at him with narrowed eyes. He cocks his head and shoves his hands into his pockets, "If he gets physical, you don't want us intervening. I don't know if that's the best idea-"

Tony scoffed and rolled his eyes, "Yes, I'm gonna be able to take it," he says dismissively, waving his hand. "Shut up. Sam, how did that background check go?"

Sam, who had just walked in the lab doors along side Cap, smirked before he slid the folder across the table and patted it in the center, "There's yours. Everything is duplicated and on multiple secure sites. I had FRIDAY send another copy to the downloading page."

Tony flipped through it and whistled, eyes widening at some of the pages he skimmed. He closed it and spread his hand out cockily, "It's amazing what you can do with a power team and the best technology in the world, isn't that right FRIDAY?"

"That is correct, sir." Even the A.I. was smirking.

"And our footprints are brushed away, correct?" he said, just to make sure.

"No links or even a slight connection to you or Stark Industries. Or any of your companions for that matter," FRIDAY confirmed.

"Outstanding," Tony grinned confidently.

Wanda tossed Tony the thumb drive with a smile. "Use it well," she suggested. "It's got Clint's footage. He finished." Tony caught it with a smile before plugged it into the computer and started downloading the rest of the content onto it. "And then don't forget to also add live footage from Cap's feed too," she reminded him with a smile.

"Wouldn't want to miss that," he nodded, giving her a thumbs up and a wink. Once he was done, he saved everything, unplugged it, and handed it over to Rhodey. "I think you have a press conference to hold in a couple minutes?"

Rhodey looked at the watch and fake gasped, backing for the door with a grin, gripping the thumb drive in his fist, "My God, I do. See you soon."

"11 am," Tony winked. He looked over at Peter whose knuckles were white from gripping the

table. Tony rolled his chair over and made eye contact with him after a lot of head bobbing. "Hey," he clasped Peter's knee and nodded, "this is gonna work, kid."

11:15 AM

"I hardly see how you even have grounds for a case here Mr. Ross, please explain why you're even taking Probate law upon yourself?" Roger demanded.

"Do not address my client directly," the young lawyer squeaked.

Tony blinked at him and shook his head, "What's your name, kid?" Tony missed Peter's slight head turn at the nickname, and look of disappointment when it wasn't used to refer to him.

"Thomas, sir," the man responded with wide eyes.

"Cool, I'm gonna call you Tom, okay?" Tony nodded, motioning to him with a smile. Then he pointed at Ross before back to himself, "We're all enemies here, so there's really no room for the trivial things. Second, if you want to make it in this conference room, let alone out in the world of law, you've got to grow a pair."

"I'm here because I am concerned for Mr. Parker's well being when no one else is," Ross sniffed, clasping his hands and sinking into his seat. The entire table snorted.

Peter laughed loudly, snarling, "Cut the crap. You could care less about me, unless I'm not next to Tony, then you're thrilled. You're here because you hate both of us and this is the one way you think you can take your childish revenge. It's mature, really," he drawls sarcastically, his eyes flashing.

Roger put up his hand before putting them together and resting on the table, "So what is the compromise we can get to here? How do we make this go away? It's what the Board requests, how do we make it happen?"

"I'm not backing down until that kid is far away from Tony Stark," Ross snarled.

"Well then pack a lunch, Ross, cause' that's not gonna happen," Tony swore, looking him dead in the eyes.

"It's almost like you hate Peter more than Tony, why don't you sue him?" Clint suggested absentmindedly, spinning in his chair at the end of the table.

"He's not wrong," Nat muttered, giving Barton a subtle fist bump the next time he did a full circle.

"I do not hate Peter," Ross said through gritted teeth, knowing full well that his best option was to convince the people around the table that he was doing this for Peter's sake, and not his hatred for Tony. That would never work, though. It was pretty much 7 against 2. 9 if you counted Ross' lawyer who probably didn't even agree with him, and the guy at the end of the table who was watching wide eyes and absentmindedly writing things down.

Tony raised an eyebrow, "Then why did you accuse him of punching you? I wouldn't do that to someone I *liked*."

Ross' eyes flashed and he stared at the table to maintain his composure. "Because he did punch me," he said through gritted teeth.

"Now why on Earth would Peter punch you? Were you doing something wrong? No, of course you weren't, because you're Mr. Perfect. Keep in mind that no one here saw that he punched you," Tony motioned around the table. "And the Board has overruled that rumor. Which is why I want to know why a hurt sixteen year old kid would walk up to a stunning general like yourself and clock him one? It just...doesn't make sense." Tony leaned back in his chair and spread his hand, "Please, enlighten me."

"I don't have time for this," Ross snarled. "You are incapable of having the child in your legal guardianship."

"Okay, so say we give the legal guardianship over to Cap, problem solved," Tony suggested with a casual shrug. Cap smirked and so did Peter.

"No," Ross immediately snapped, before he bit his tongue, everyone looking at him with raised eyebrows.

"Exactly," Tony points at him. "So it's about me, not the kid. You hate me."

"It's because he would still be in this environment," Ross said, trying to cover his blunder.

Rhodey scoffed and crossed his arms, knitting his brow. "Right, which means..."

"Tony Stark and Peter Parker have an undeniable codependent relationship," Ross snarls, looking at everyone in the room like this was some kind of breaking news he had just uncovered.

"And?" Tony drawled.

"The medical term of codependency is a negative one," Ross says firmly. He points at Tony like he's trying to burn his heart out with his finger, "If I got you in that stand at a public court, I would have someone dissect you like a bug. Then I'd get you diagnosed by a therapist who would prove that this 'die to save each other' business is toxic and unhealthy. Being codependent is a dangerous thing that people look down upon. This- this, *willingness* to die for one another, to protect each other, to let the world burn just so the other can live?" Ross swore. "You're practically throwing yourselves in front of bullets, which puts Peter in danger."

"All intriguing points," Tony drawls. He was not about to contradict any of those things, because most of them were true and both he and Peter knew it. He sighs and smiles, "First off, you don't have the authority to call me to a public trial. Boo hoo you. Even if you did, please tell me it's not gonna be this lawyer who's gonna try and take me apart on the stand, no offence. And now, Ross, you're starting to sound like a crazy person. You're judging me, but I think you're the one who needs to see a therapist."

"What else is new?" Natasha mumbled lowly.

"You would kill for him. You would die for him," Ross pointed to Peter who straightened in his chair.

"Yes," Tony nods without missing a beat. If there was a camera on the two of them, it would have panned to Peter, because his expression went unmatched.

"It's unhealthy!" Ross splutters.

"So are the cheeseburgers I keep eating, but look, I'm still alive," Tony winks.

Ross' face twists and he grits his teeth. "Ok, smart guy. Here's another thing. I know all about your

little fight," he says lowly, his gaze cold. Peter and Tony snap their heads up in shock, exchanging looks. How he figured it out, they had no idea, but this wasn't good. Tony's vision tunneled and his fists curled.

Fear shone on both of their faces as they swallowed and turned to their accuser. Ross had an evil smirk, and he leans forward, eyes gleaming. "For the record, I would like to comment that Tony Stark *walked out* on Peter Parker and cut off all contact, which led to this innocent kid being kidnapped due to Tony's neglect, failure of protection, and absence of acknowledgement. Neglect is one of the grounds I have a right to plead, with evidence to support it. It has happened in the past and I fear this will happen again- that Tony Stark will walk out on Peter Parker again-

"Ross you evil son of a-" Tony swore, more mad than he's probably ever been because Ross was leaning on the edge of right. Tony would never walk out on Peter again, he swore that to himself, but he had done it. *He had done it*. He had neglected him, he had cut him out, and it led to Peter being kidnapped- even the kid himself had admitted it in his anger.

"No, I want you to confirm this, Tony," the man said firmly, leaning back in his chair, a sudden flip as the confidence was switched from person to person. "Did you or did you not walk out on Peter Parker? And cut him from your life?" Ross demanded with a knowing smile. "We're all waiting."

Tony couldn't lie. Tony couldn't deny the fact that he had willingly hurt the kid, that he had confidently walked out, completely in his right mind. He had cut Peter off on purpose, and accepted everything that came with it. Peter had been kidnapped and he hadn't known about it for a week, and then the kid had just been hurt more because of him. Every fiber of Tony's body would prevent him from lying, because that would hurt Peter. Every part of him knew he had to admit he did walk out on the kid. There was no way around this, and Ross knew it. That had been the reason the man had targeted this spot. He knew Tony let the guilt layer on his shoulders, willing to hold the weight, heck, accepting the weight. Guilt was something Tony couldn't deny, because he believed it himself. So when Ross asked him to confirm what he did was true, he knew Tony had to, for his sake and for Peter's.

The room was silent. The Avengers tried not to look as guilty as Tony's sure he did.

"I-" He flexed his hands and licked his lips, trying to find his voice. His hands were shaking beneath the table and Tony's eyes began to burn as he remembered the look on Peter's face just as he turned around. He would be saying that never happened. He would be dismissing the kid's pain.

"No."

Tony nearly snapped his neck whirling to look at Peter who had beat him to it. The entire room froze. Ross' reaction was probably the best though; the man almost fell out of the chair in shock. Something in his desperate plan had gone wrong, and it rocked him to his core. The general faltered and muttered with a nervous laugh, "Repeat yourself Mr. Parker... if you don't mind?"

"One of us did walk out, but it wasn't Tony, it was me," Peter said weakly. Tony nearly died on the spot but he held in the audible gasp for all it was worth. Everything spiraled, and suddenly his shoulders felt lighter. He released the weight was going to Peter and as much he tried to pull it back in desperation, not wanting to to fall to the kid, Peter had ripped it away and Tony....Tony felt his shoulders relax. It was horror, but it was relaxed horror, as if he could finally take a deep breath. And he hated himself for that, because he was not ducking away from the blame, or realizing that it wasn't his fault because it still was. But Peter being the one to say that it wasn't Tony's fault impacted him more than anything. He was at a loss for words, but he knew he couldn't jeopardize this. Peter was already in this, taking responsibility, and he might have just ended the case.

With Tony still staring at him, trying to mask his shock, the boy licked his lips, managing to keep his voice level. His eyes were firm and cold, unblinking, "I walked out on him because after I got hurt by the Green Goblin protecting him, I was scared. I was the one who cut off all contact, not Tony."

Ross looks more deflated then he's ever been and he splutters angrily, "Well do you have proof?"

Peter's eyes are full of tears and so are Tony's. His gaze has not left the kid. Usually his head is filled with sarcastic comments, alerts from FRIDAY from his glasses, things he noticed about the two people in front of him, terrors of the past few weeks- years- life- memories with Peter...but now? Now it was silent. It was blank and it was quiet. Tony focused on Peter, the kid he *had* abandoned, who was now taking the fall for him, was taking *responsibility*, who was lying about the one thing that they could both agree was Tony's fault. And as a thought suddenly dawned on Peter's face through a flinch, Tony's heart ached to think about what proof he could possibly have that would-

"FRIDAY connect to Karen please," Peter said quietly, listing off a date and time. "Can you please play the audio from that morning?"

"*Sure thing,*" FRIDAY said with sympathy. Peter's trembling voice hit the speakers and Tony immediately flinched at the pain he heard. "*Karen? Delete and block all the Avengers from my phone, ok? And anything related to Stark Industries.*"

"*The next line is removed due to relation to a deleted subject on the A.I.'s hard drive. The audio from the receiving end remains saved however,*" FRIDAY explained slowly.

Tony's shaking and he looks over at Peter who is clenching his jaw as hard as he can, a tear trickling down his cheek as he blinks too harshly. Tony is still frozen in shock, unable to speak as the kid's voice rings out again from the speakers, coming out as half a sob and trailing off towards the end, "*Yes. Yes, all of it. GPS, everything. And do me a favor...can you...forget it too?*"

The recording cuts out and Peter calmly leans forward across the table. His voice is full of venom as he snarls, "Is that proof enough for you?" but he's carrying himself in such a way that makes him intimidating.

Ross meets his glare just barely, eager to look away and stutters, "Well- I- I thought-"

"You thought wrong," Peter retorts almost immediately. "But since that was your main reason for why I should get away from Tony, Clint's right, maybe you should sue me instead," the teen hisses, sinking back into his seat. He still hadn't blinked.

"You have no right to speak to me like that-" Ross retorts with fire in his gaze, standing up out of his chair. Peter flinched at the harsh sound of metal scraping across the floor.

And now Tony has had enough. He stands with a massive sigh, putting a supportive hand on Peter's arm as he does before he points to the lawyer next to Ross, "Out. You too typing guy. Both of you, out." He shakes Roger's hand and the man leaves to wait outside, per their agreement earlier.

"I legally have to be present sir," Thomas says quietly.

"My God I forgot you were there," Clint admits with a jump, staring at the man across from him.

"He's staying," Ross snarls calmly, crossing his arms with a glint in his eye.

Tony sighs and nods. It was time to end this. "Two words. Cardinal Ford."

Ross blanches. Tony raises his eyebrows. That's about all Ross needs, who then nods to his lawyer. Thomas gladly leaves the room, tripping over his feet. Tony looks over at the man sitting in the corner who gets up immediately and leaves. The door closes and the tension in the room triples, which shouldn't even be possible. Ross is staring down and he slowly lowers himself back into the chair. Then he growls, "What about it?"

"Oh, a lot," Tony promises with a smile. "I know that you cheated to get your position even remotely close to the Board."

"Everyone cheats. It's politics. If you don't, you get stepped on," Ross sneers, spreading his hands cockily. "That's hardly a case, since you would also be convicting almost every single person in a high office position," he scoffs, as if he had dug himself out of the hole when in reality, he had just knocked the shovel further away. "But if it makes you feel better, the men on the panel are old lunatics who know nothing on how to do their job or even dress themselves, so my job is not as glamorous as you think."

Tony holds back a smile as best he can, and so does everyone else in the room. Then he shakes his head and clicks his tongue, "By God, I bet you wish you could tell them that. Oh wait, there's more. I took the time to gather Thunderbolt Ross' best hits. Have a look." He bends down, wincing at his bullet wound and picks up the folder, slamming it down on the table and shoving it towards Ross.

The man scoffed, pulling it into his reach before casually opening it. The minute his eyes fell on the page, pure fear rippled through his face and he sucked in a breath, straightening, his brow creasing. He sifts frantically through the pages and pictures, eyes wild. He curses once he's done, his turning of pages getting more and more violent as he nears the end. Then he slams his hand down on the table as he shoot out of his seat, "This is illegal!"

"Why do you think we had the lawyers leave?" Natasha mumbles, biting her nail in deep thought.

"Yes, Ross, all the scams you pulled were illegal," Peter nodded happily. He looks around with a happy laugh, "He's getting it!"

Tony grins. "See we did a little digging into your funding, your personal security, even the two men behind you. I know everything down to what you like in your coffee, and you have some shady crap that you've been covering up for the past...thirty years. Going behind the board's back, reverting destinations of major account deposits, even dealing under the table- you know those are criminal offenses, right?" Tony winced, standing as well with a sigh.

"You're blackmailing me," Ross swore, dropping the folder onto the table.

Tony nodded with an innocent smile, "Of course we are, especially now that you didn't deny the fact that the hundreds of allegations in there are true, which half of them aren't, they were just made to look really really convincing. So that just means there's even more crap that we didn't feel like putting in the effort to dig up!"

Ross' eyes flashed and he spoke through his teeth, shaking in anger, "What's your proposition?"

Tony shrugs and stands, circling the table, the group of Avengers following him. "You drop this entire lawsuit and promise never to come near us again. I'm sure you can think of something to tell the Board."

"Or?" Ross swears furiously.

Tony snickers and stares him dead in the eye, "Or I let these go public."

Ross shakes his head before he strides forward and gets in Tony's face, "I could end you, right now. You have no suit. I could take you."

"Oh I get all tingly when you threaten me like that Ross," Tony drawls, not amused. He knew Ross would snap. He had been counting on it. Usually, even though they hated each other, a screaming match was as far as it got. But lately, when Ross got backed into a corner, he fought back, violently, and Tony really hoped he did. It made things more interesting.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't get very far," Peter snarls, stepping up to his side in defense, staring down Ross with literal murder in his eyes.

"You gonna punch me again, Peter?" Ross taunts, smirking down at him. "Am I getting too close for your liking to your father?"

Peter's gaze hasn't left his enemy and he nods, not missing a beat, "Yeah, actually, you are," he speaks dangerously. "Back up."

While Ross is looking at Peter, Tony manages to lock gazes with Rhodey who puts up a subtle two fingers. He had two minutes to stall. Shrugging, he walked over to Ross' chair and took a seat. "Funny thing is, you can't touch me, Ross. You're gonna allow me to walk all over you because I hold all the cards."

The team backs up at the sentence, but Peter doesn't, and neither does Steve. Tony knows why, and while his gaze is averted, Ross walks forward and slams his hands down on the chair, on either side of Tony's head, demanding, "You think you control me now?"

Tony doesn't even flinch. He just nods and makes a face before admitting, "Yeah, yeah, I do. Because you don't want all of that crap going public. You like your job, and you're hoping to get a spot on the panel full of, and I'm quoting you here, old lunatics who know nothing on how to do their job or even dress themselves. I could be wrong though. Feel free to share with the class."

Ross seethes and grabs Tony by the collar, Peter letting out a low growl as he physically flinches. He looks sideways at Steve with a knowing look and nods as he lunges forward.

Peter stands waiting in the hallway, biting his lip as he scuffed his shoe against the floor. Finally Steve walks around the corner and he practically lunges for him. Steve doesn't jump in surprise like he thought he would, instead he looks like he was almost expecting him. Peter brushes his hand against his arm and mutters, "Cap, I need a favor."

Steve slows his walk and frowns. "Yeah, Pete, what do you need? Peter, sorry," he corrects instantly, noticing the slight change in Peter's facial expressions.

The boy gives him a grateful smile that he respected his nickname but it does little to mask the look of nervousness. He scratches at his cast and speaks slowly, "Tony's gonna go toe to toe with Ross here. It's gonna get physical and he can get seriously hurt. I need you-" Peter bites his lip. "To help me intervene."

"Peter," Steve sighs.

Peter shakes his head and pleads, "Just get Tony out of there, I'll take care of Ross. He hates me just as much, heck, I'll punch him again if I have to. But face it Steve, one fall and Tony can bust a rib and tear open his bullet wound or- or- just-" he stumbles over his own words in fear and blurts out, "He could get seriously hurt."

Steve looks wary and tired and he manages a small smile while lowering his gaze, "Look, kid, I-"

"Please, Steve. I can't let him get hurt. Not by someone like Ross," Peter swears, pulling his puppy eyes as his pleading voice fades.

Steve looks like it pains him to, but he finally nods, "O-okay."

Peter sighs in relief and just then, Tony walks around the corner with a grin. He wiggles his eyebrows, "What are we talking about?"

"Eh, nothing," Peter assures him with a smirk, lying almost perfectly that even Steve looks surprised. "Just how much Ross sucks."

"Darn right," Tony agrees, walking by and clapping Steve on the shoulder.

Ross has Tony by the collar, and Peter starts towards him for all he's worth because no one, *no one* touches Tony. Steve moves forward too and the boy is about to grin that he kept his promise when suddenly the man's strong arms encircle him and pull him back. Peter yelps and immediately starts struggling, "Steve!"

Ross pulls Tony up from his seat and Peter thrashes, letting out a strangled cry of, "No! Steve- you said-"

"Sorry kid, you weren't the first one who asked for a favor," Steve mumbled quietly. His look was honestly sad as he held Peter who was squirming to get out of his hold.

"What?" Peter gasps desperately, Steve twisting his hand in Peter's jacket to keep him from charging the two men.

Tony waits, leaning against the wall until finally Cap walks by. He yanks his arm before he can turn the corner and motions him into the nearest room.

"What?" Steve hisses.

"Peter's gonna hear you if we're out there," Tony explains.

Cap frowns and looks out the closing door with confusion, "Peter's out there?"

"Ten bucks he's waiting for you around the corner. If he's not, what I'm about to say still stands, but I just don't know the kid as well as I think I do."

"What are you about to say?" Cap asks slowly, crossing his arms.

Tony sighs and pleads, "I need a favor."

"Of course you do," Steve says dryly.

"I need you to lie to Peter," Tony winces. Steve's eyes widen and he waves his hands, "It's not what you think. When you walk around that hall, he's gonna ask you to do him a favor and intervene when we let Ross go nuclear. He's gonna ask you to get me out of there so he can take the hits. That can't happen. I need you to tell him you're with him, but when it comes down to it, I need to count on you to hold him back."

"Why?" Steve demands. He puts a hand on his friend's shoulder, "Look, Tones, not that we don't believe in you, but you aren't in the best condition to be fighting right now."

"It won't be a fight," Tony says weakly.

"Even all the more reason!" Steve splutters.

"I can't let him get hurt because of me. Not again. He's back. He's safe. And I'm not walking out again, I am here, and I am protecting him. Ross won't lay a hand on my kid. Because I swear to God, if he does, I will kill him. Steve, that's a promise. And that's why you need to hold Peter back. If Ross so much as scratches him..." Tony's eyes are wide, emotional, and serious. And there's anger in them that Cap recognizes immediately, and it makes him wary. "I will Rogers. And that can't happen. Promise me you'll hold him back." He pats him on the chest and insists. "I need him safe, I am trusting you, Steve."

"Tones," Steve says weakly, running a hand through his hair.

"Rogers, please," Tony insists, clasping his shoulder. "You've got to back me on this one," he begs.

Steve locks eyes with him and sighs, nodding. "Okay. Okay. So now I have to go lie to my own nephew?"

"I'll take the fall for it later," Tony says with a nod, patting him on the back as he exits the room.

Steve takes a deep breath and mutters, "That's comforting." Then he walks around the corner that's further down the hall and Tony hears Peter's voice. He listens to the conversation and when it's safe and the deal has been made just like he knew it would be, he shows himself, smiling as if nothing his happening. Steve's face is pale and sad, but Peter's had snapped back to normal within seconds. Tony guessed he wasn't the only one who had become an expert on putting on an act.

Tony wiggles his eyebrows as he approaches and asks, "What are we talking about?"

"Nothing," Peter assures him with a smirk. He's lying, Tony can tell. Even if he hadn't known. Peter's voice is off a slight bit. To anyone else it's convincing. To Tony it's not. "Just how much Ross sucks."

"Darn right," Tony agrees, walking by and clapping Steve on the shoulder. He exchanges a look with him that clearly says: thank you.

"You really have lost it Ross, haven't you?" Tony taunts the man with a smile. "I'm fine, Peter," he insists firmly, shooting the kid a look, recognizing the horror on the teen's face as he's still shoving Steve backward in attempts to get away and help him. It's difficult, but he forces his gaze back to his opponent, "You won't punch me. You don't have the guts."

Ross curls his fist and Peter yells, "No! Stop it!" He thrashes in Steve's grip. "Ross, don't touch him, I swear to God-"

"It looks like your son over there is watching," Ross taunts. Tony locks eyes with Peter again but only for a horrible second. The horror is gone, it's just anger now. "Maybe he should close his eyes," the man snarls, pushing Tony against the wall.

"Use your words buddy, just take a deep breath," Tony laughs with encouragement, patting him on the chest. "You watch The Office? Pull an Andy, punch the wall. Hell on your knuckles but you'll feel so much better after, I swear," he suggests.

Ross curls his fist, just like Tony knew he would. Now he had snapped because he knew he could, because he had nothing else to hold over Tony, and Tony had something to hold over him. "Stop talking Stark."

"You really went downhill, didn't you? A year ago, did you think we'd be where we are now in our relationship? You shoving me up against a wall? Wow, sounds kinky. I'm not a fan-" Tony smirks. Ross snarls.

"Ross!" Peter swears desperately, trying to twist and break Cap's hold on his jacket. "Steve- let go!"

Tony's really only focused on Peter, everything except his gaze and his voice. He maintains his cocky grin even with Peter's protests hitting him like sharp cuts, reminding him of every time the kid had screamed over the past week. His anger fuels him and his tone has a biting edge to it, "It's real sad, how you can just be so willing to throw everything away, just because of me. You really hate me that much?" Tony asks simply, pouting out his lower lip.

"Yes," Ross snarls, throwing a punch. Tony ducks but it still nicks him slightly, Peter letting out a strangled yell from behind him as he twists and breaks the man's hold. Ross pushes him back and shakes his head, spreading his arms, "Tough guy is all an act. Even your team doesn't have your back when it really counts, I guess they want to see you get what you deserve."

"Or what you deserve," Tony mutters quietly to himself, licking his bleeding lip. He would have clocked the guy one, but the higher Ross thought he was, the better it would feel to watch him fall. It wasn't exactly....Tony didn't know the right word for it, only that it made him sound twisted. But at the moment he didn't care, because threatening his kid brought out his dark side, and Ross was about to learn that.

The man with the evil grin that he would soon lose didn't hear him; he was too pissed. He points behind him in frustration, "The only one who is fighting for you is your annoying teenage brat who won't shut up!"

Well now he crossed a line. Tony snarls and slams his foot straight into Ross' knee as hard as he possibly can, with his bad leg simply because that was closest, the man yelping in pain and staggering back until he hit the wall, clutching his kneecap. Tony barely feels the sting in his thigh as he wipes his lip and sighs, grabbing the TV remote and turning to the team.

He nods at Steve who lets go of Peter, the boy shoving him away. In a flash, the kid is across the room, with eyes only for Ross but Tony sidesteps in front of him, grabbing his arm. "He's done. I'm fine. Stick to the plan," he hisses, locking gazes with him in a desperate battle to convince the teen. Peter shakes his arm out of his grasp angrily, glaring at the man still up against the wall.

Tony turns around and looks at his enemy, "Well thank you for the show Ross, I know the board enjoyed it."

"Are you kidding me? The Board will never hear about this. I am deep in every one of their pockets, they're practically my puppets," Ross scoffs confidently.

Tony makes a face and walks over to the phone in the middle of the table, pressing the unmute button. "Yeah, say hi guys, you're live."

"For your information, General Ross, we all seem to agree that we similarly dressed ourselves this morning?" The voice of the director comes out with a snarl.

"Surprise," Tony announces with a drawl.

Ross blanches, his jaw dropping in shock as he looks to all the Avengers. "I'll drop the charges," he gasps, fumbling over his own words. "I'll drop the charges."

"Deal," Tony nods, ripping the folder on the table in half. Then he winces, rubbing his chin and looking over his shoulder. "Oh, shoot- you know what? I forgot. This one is on me, I take full responsibility. This is a bummer," Tony mutters with a sigh. "You see, I told the press just in case that there would be a big, what should I call it, blow out, here?" He sees the massive crowd of reporters surging for the door like they knew they would, right on time. Tony grins and points, "Rhodey look, it's our friends from the press."

At the mention of cameras, this is when Peter has to step back, and he knows it. For right now they're keeping his identity a secret. Tony knows the kid doesn't want to, but he encourages him with a nod. Peter retreats into the group but not before he hisses to Steve, "Protect him. He'll let himself get punched if you don't. Ross is desperate now." Steve nods to him as Peter backs into the corner, the Avengers shifting to hide him as the room floods with cameras.

One of the reporters shouts, "Are the allegations true General Ross?"

"What allegations-" Ross stutters with wide and fearful eyes, turning to Tony in horror.

About ten microphones are shoved in his face, "A thumb drive was released containing detailed information of instances where you undermined-"

"Oh wow, now this, this I didn't see coming," Tony mumbles, shrugging with an apologetic look. "It looks like someone leaked the information, doesn't it? And the press just happened to get a hold of a thumb drive which had all the information on it, plus a few cherries on top. Possibly someone who called a press conference right before you got here and slipped it on someone's seat. Thanks for holding the door, Rhodey," he smiled to his friend who gave him a wink and a thumbs up.

Ross whispered, "You."

"Now hold on!" Tony gasped in shock. "That seems a little specific! How come you think it was us? I was just giving a likely scenario. There is obviously some explanation for this, and I will help you find it," Tony promised with an encouraging smile. "Although, and the press don't know this yet, they're slow, but it's also all over your search history, social media, and jammed into public records. Don't ask how I know that."

"You did this," Ross seethed, turning on Tony.

Tony held up a finger, "Ah, but wait, there's more." He presses the power button on the TV remote and gasps. "Oh look Ross, you're on national television!" The man turns, his face white, and a live stream is playing of the room they're in, from the camera in the bookshelf. Tony waits a second and then rubs his chin thoughtfully as the image changes.

Tony leans forward and squints, turning up the volume, "Is that you- good God that's you shoving me- and I do think- yes that's the punch from a few seconds ago- I don't know how that got there. And look at that, we did get the footage from our first encounter. That was a couple aggressive

strides, one to a minor- that will be a killer in court, man charging 16 year old with broken arm."

"That was before he punched me," Ross retorted weakly, backing into the corner as the press followed him, shouting questions.

Tony sighed in annoyance and shrugged, speaking louder over the shutter of cameras, "Yes, or so you claim. But for some reason it just cut out right after that threatening advance. Cameras are always so tricky around here," he tisks, rubbing his chin. "How unfortunate. But man, that was just all of your highlights. Someone with very rich friends and good tech clearly manipulated and combined footage. And it's still going on, you're famous buddy, congratulations." They wanted the camera on for this last part.

"Hey, you're gonna pay me back for that editing software I used earlier today, right?" Clint asks casually. Ross' eyes widen with fury at the lack of attempts to be subtle since no one was listening to the Avengers, but screaming questions in his face instead as he batted away phones and mics shoved to his mouth.

"The one you used to edit the video for Nat's birthday? Yeah," Tony grinned, turning and facing his friend.

"Yeah, cool," Clint gave him a thumbs up, winking at Ross and spreading his hands like, *what?*

"Happy birthday Nat," Rhodey says.

"Thanks, it's in two months," Natasha smiles happily. "You guys are so sweet."

"What else do you have planned?" Ross snarls, barely able to get that sentence out. Even his voice is no longer threatening, and he looks completely deflated, and closer to crying than Tony think's he's ever been.

"Planned *unofficially*," Steve says firmly with a smile. "That makes it okay." It was a jab, and a nasty one at that. Ross' face fell at the reference to his line that he had similarly tried to use against the Avengers, something that they had just shoved back in his face.

The clips are now being replayed over the headline of another news broadcaster that the Avengers are watching on their phones, Clint bringing out the popcorn bag he had stored under the table and passing it around. Ross looks humiliated as his gaze returns to the TV, Tony flipping through the channels of everyone who immediately picked up this story. The man's gaze is filled with horror and disbelief, his mouth opening and closing as he staggers further to the wall.

"And now for a big finale. Director do you want to say it or should I?" Tony asks sweetly, changing the channel back to the livestream.

"General Ross, your services are no longer required. You are hereby removed from your duty and charged with multiple felonies against the United States Government."

"In other words," Tony grins and pouts his lower lip. "He means you're fired."

"And going to jail," Steve adds confidently.

Ross barely has time to drop his jaw, but Tony can see the broken look in his eyes that he has been waiting to see. A couple officers push past the crowd of reporters right on cue and grab Ross' arms, yanking them behind them as they slap on cuffs. The man starts fighting them, yelling curses to Tony, lunging for him as he's shoved past him.

At the last second, Tony lashes out and grabs his collar, his security officers waiting at his request. Tony stares him dead in the eyes and sees a flicker of fear in his enemy's. That was really all he needed.

"Too many people have hurt my kid. You will no longer be one of them," he said firmly. His fingers curl tighter. Tony's voice is calm but venomous, and loud enough that Peter can hear him. "This is what you get, this is what you deserve. Enjoy prison."

"You'll pay for this," Ross snarls.

Tony smirks and looks down, "I'm a billionaire. I'll be fine. You on the other hand, I hope you've learned your lesson. Don't mess with me," he says with a light and gentle tone before landing a solid punch to his face. Ross' head snaps to the side and Tony's gaze flashes as he yanks him closer, Ross' nose bleeding.

"And don't mess with my son." Tony lands a second punch to his stomach, digging his fist in before shoving him backward. Ross groans and Tony pats him on the cheek once he raises his head, "Bundle up out there Thunderbolt." He nods to the two security guards who are trying to hide their smirks. "You're good to go guys, thanks."

"And then he just left?" Ned marveled, waiting on the steps of the school as Peter told him the whole story.

"Yeah, escorted out by police," Peter grinned, his hand in his pocket, his other gripping his backpack strap. "It was pretty great."

"And you're coming to school the day after that happened?" Ned asked in disbelief, looking at his friend warily. Of course he was happy he was back, and he hadn't seen Peter this happy in over three months, but he was still concerned that this was a little too soon.

Peter rolled his eyes, "Not you too. Look, technically, according to the press, I wasn't even there. Tony didn't want me to come today either but truth is, I've missed way too much. With Ross out of the way, I need to stop putting it aside. And I got my cast off!" He flexed his hand and moved his arm around with a sigh of relief. "So yeah, I'm fine. I'm a little banged up in some places but my clothes cover most of them, no one will ever know."

Ned looked him over. Peter looked tired, but he was right, most of his scars were covered, and the black eye and cuts on his face were barely visible. His arm was torn up, Ned knew that because he had seen the gashes when he came over, but Peter was wearing jeans and a long sleeve sweater today.

"Peter?" someone called.

Peter turned around and saw MJ storming towards him. "Hey," he grinned as she stopped a foot away. Peter lost the grin immediately when punched him hard in his arm. "Ow," he yelped, rubbing the sore spot. "Good to see you too?"

"You should be at home," she pursed her lips with worry that she didn't want to express, he could tell, but even she was nervous to see him here.

Peter groaned, "Look, guys, I want to be back at school, is that so awful? I need a distraction, I need to focus, and I need to put aside everything else crazy in my life and take a chem test."

"Crazy like Tony Stark is your dad now crazy," Ned giggled, trying to keep his voice down. Peter had told him on a face time call the other night and he hadn't shut up about it.

Peter put a hand to the bridge of his nose as he walked through the doors of his school for the first time in weeks, "Yes...Ned...that too..." God he missed this building. He ducked to avoid a drone without even turning towards it, and for a second his legs were locked so MJ and Ned had to pull him out of the crowd trying to get through the doors. They were heading to the stairs but Peter found his voice and spun, "P-principals first. Gotta...let him know what happened. Tony called earlier but I bet he thinks that was just a prank."

"We'll back you up with whatever you need," Ned whispered as they slipped into the office.

"Peter Parker, good to have you back with us," Principal Morita grins and walks forward, offering him his hand.

Peter gladly shook it now that he had full access to his arm and hand again. "Good to be back. Sorry, I had to take a leave of absence for...personal reasons."

"I heard," Morita nodded with assurance. His face had a look of a bit of disbelief when he admitted, "Mr. Stark called me. Said you would prefer if people didn't know, which I completely respect. And I am...very sorry for your loss." He was one of the first people besides family and friends to seem sincere. "If you need any help easing back in-"

"I'm okay," Peter forced a smile. He had told Tony that he was okay with telling them it was because of May. They needed to change paperwork anyway, and Tony did that with three words to FRIDAY. "I just need to know what I missed so I can start catching up."

"Well I was very impressed with you keeping up with your homework and projects on the side," he admitted, mistaking Peter's shock as appreciation. "Ned is such a good friend for taking extras from teachers and having you complete them. He brought them to every class with him."

Peter looked sideways at Ned who smirked and he grinned, "Yeah, he's a great friend."

"Test wise you have about six to make up if I remember correctly, which shouldn't be too hard. And given your situation and the fact that you are on most of their lists of favorite students, I think you can pull it off," he smiled.

"Thanks Principal Morita," Peter grinned as they all said they respected goodbyes and walked out of the office. Peter shoved Ned in the shoulder and laughed, "Dude, you did my homework for me?"

Ned shrugged, "It was all easy stuff, you knew it already, I swear. It wasn't hard. I just said you were sick and that you asked if I could bring you the homework and pick it up when I took the subway to school."

"Look at you breaking the rules," MJ snorted as they started up the staircase, avoiding the wave of people coming down.

Ned looked over at her and frowned, "What are you talking about? I break the rules all the time! Peter and I once brought in an alien rock that turned out to be a bomb and took it apart in the engineering and welding room so you know what, I'd say we did pretty good for being secret rule breakers."

"Not so secret if you say it that loud," Peter hissed. MJ was staring at him as they headed for the lockers and he spluttered, "Well we didn't know it was a bomb."

"Look. Who's. Back!"

Peter flinched but kept walking. That was until he felt his backpack yanked from behind him. Peter hissed slightly as he was spun around and Flash waved in his face, "Super glad you could make it today, Peter. How was your little vacation?"

"Great, thanks," Peter sneered, turning around again and starting to walk.

"Wow, you came back with more attitude than before," Flash wiggled his eyebrows and cut in front of him, walking backward as Peter tried to get to his class, MJ and Ned at his side. "Where'd you go, Bahamas?"

"Saint Martin actually," Peter countered with a cocky smile.

Flash let out a scoff and stopped walking backward, Peter immediately cutting himself off so he didn't run into him. "We all heard about your aunt here. First your parents, then your uncle, then your aunt? You cursed Parker?"

"Hopefully," Peter snarled through his teeth. "Because you seem to hang around me a lot so maybe you'll bite the dust too." He was tired of people using his aunt's death against him. Yes. It was his fault, he had accepted that. But he knew she wouldn't want him to be in more pain because of it. That was something that couldn't break him anymore.

"Wow, you grow a pair while you were out?" Flash laughed in amusement, slightly taken back by Peter's boldness. Some of his friends gave him a nervous look, expecting him to do better.

Yes, Peter wanted to say, I got to practice my sarcasm for a week and a half by a guy who tortured me until I screamed. Instead, what came out was the product of what had happened, "Maybe. Who knows? But I see you lost yours. I'd help you find it, but I don't care."

He sidestepped and tried to walk past and Flash jammed his shoulder into Peter's. He choked on a cry and grit his teeth, glaring at the bully. Flash's eyes locked with his and his lip curled, "You know what other rumor is going around? That you live at the Avengers compound and that Tony Stark is your father."

"Oh gee," Peter drawled, Flash's shoulder digging into his bad arm. "I'm sure that gets your pants in a knot."

"I've been beating up the kid's that think it's true. You don't think it's true, do you Pete? I mean, of course it's not. What would Tony Stark want with a kid like you? Even if he did know you, he'd probably sprint for the door a minute after meeting you," Flash giggled.

Peter's heart was suddenly clenched and he sucked in a breath. What he let out was, "It's *Peter*. Bye Flash." It was the first time he had corrected him in three months.

"Just watch yourself Parker," the boy warned, ruffling his hair before returning to his friends down the hallway. Peter straightened his jacket and ran a hand through his curls, hating anyone messing it up other than Tony.

MJ and Ned closed in on him again and he muttered, "You okay?"

"I'm remembering why I didn't want to go back to school now," Peter grumbled as he entered the classroom.

Peter flexed his arm as he entered the kitchen; it was still sore from Flash's jab. He set down his backpack, fighting a smile of the millions of times he had done *that* in the past as he walked around the corner. The Avengers were all seated around the table, and Tony was the first to look up. He had been texting Peter throughout the day, and knew he was coming home, but it was still a relief to see the kid walk through the door safe and unhurt. Except for his arm.

"I'm fine," Peter assured him, alerting his presence to the rest of the team who called out greetings. "Just getting used to it out of the cast."

"Is it stiff?" Bruce asked with concern, adjusting his glasses. He had been away at a medical conference for the past couple days, which caused the delay of taking Peter's cast off because he didn't want anyone else to do it. Bruce had done a great job with the removal of it, but Flash's jab to his once shattered arm so soon had just made it a little tense.

Peter flexed it to show him he could still move it without screaming pain (which was progress compared to when Toomes had broke it) and shook his head, "No, no, it's great. Thanks Bruce." That man had patched him up more times than Peter could count, he wasn't about to make him doubt his work. At some point he needed to tell him there was a black and white picture of the man hanging in his classroom.

"How was school?" Steve asked, sipping coffee.

Peter smiled confidently, working hard to skip over the wince as he remembered they bully's words, "Good to be back. Made up two of my tests so four to go."

"That's it?" Clint frowned with a shocked expression. "When I went to school, we did nothing. When I missed it, I was making up work for weeks," he grumbled, drowning his sorrows in a big gulp of coffee.

Peter grinned and scratched his neck, feeling Tony's gaze on him since he had said school was fine. Peter stayed on track, admitting, "My friend Ned did all my homework for me." Everyone whistled and Peter nodded with a quick and dismissive, "But yeah, yeah, it was...fine."

"You kiss MJ yet?" Sam asked out of nowhere with an innocent gaze, Bucky snickering beside him.

"No," Peter scowled, turning on the man responsible. "Tony, I swear to God, this is your fault for telling them-" The culprit put his hands up in surrender, sipping coffee as he did so.

"There's nothing wrong with having a crush on someone," Wanda announced to the table, nodding to Peter.

"Of course there isn't," Rhodey nodded, setting down his phone. "So when are you asking her out?"

Before Peter could start throwing punches, Tony got up and tossed his head to the hallway, "We're going to the lab before someone gets murdered. Pizza tonight. 3 toppings for 5 different pizzas. Agree on them and have them on the table for when I get back or we're getting plain cheese, anchovies, and pineapple. Make it work because I really don't feel like throwing up today." He put his hand on Peter's shoulder as he walked by and felt him flinch underneath it, immediately recoiling his hand in concern.

Peter looked up innocently and shook his head with a fake grin, "Just a chill."

"FRIDAY, turn the degree up a notch?" Tony said slowly, eyeing him with suspicion.

"Funny how you have a thermostat for that," she sighed.

"Thanks FRIDAY," Tony smiled.

"Can I have coffee?" Peter asked with a grin.

"No," Tony said instantly, but he handed over his cup as they walked through the door. It was when they were seated at opposite lab tables about ten minutes later when Tony said, "So what really happened at school today?"

Peter frowned and looked over his shoulder, "What does that mean?"

"Your shoulder," Tony says, leaning to pull over a 3D screen with his good arm, muttering about how he hated the cast he was still in and couldn't wait to get it off.

Peter sighed, "Fine. I hit the side of the wall- forgot how crazy the landing of the stairs was."

"You sure?" Tony asked again.

Peter spun in his chair, "Yes, Tony, I'm 100% sure I hit my arm on the wall. Why? What do you think happened?"

"Nothing," Tony said, but he could hear the difference in his voice and it killed him. But Peter had seen him in here, having a nightmare, dreaming of Peter getting hurt because of him. This was something he didn't need to know, for both their sakes.

Peter intently stares at the connector he was fixing, gaze flicking over to the levels on the side while he slipped it back into the gauntlet's panel. "How about you? How are you feeling?"

"Like I got shot," Tony says back. Peter throws a crumpled piece of paper over his shoulder, trying to hit him blindly. "You missed," Tony snorted. "I'm fine kid, getting better. Slowly. Hey give me a better toss with the Philips over there." Peter finds it on the desk and flips it behind him, Tony catching it without turning around. "Thanks. In case you want to hear about my day, I'm sure you do, I had a conference call to attend and it was the most boring thing I've done in my life."

"Is that so?" Peter smirks. "I figure it would be great with what you did exposing Ross."

"You'd think," Tony laughs lightly. "But no, still boring as all get out. Although I did enjoy the director personally thanking me like a gun was being held to his head," he admitted, tossing the fixed gauntlet to the side where it zooms back to sink into the suit. Tony wipes his hand on his jean leg and turns on his chair, asking, "You get sleep last night?"

"I grabbed a couple hours," Peter lied, running a hand through his hair, as he crouches over his work. "You?"

"Same," Tony lied flatly. There was a second of silence. Then the man hung his head and sighed, "Kid, you didn't sleep, did you?"

Peter set down his tool and turned in his chair with an embarrassed frown, "No. And neither did you, liar."

"You lied first," Tony grumbled. Peter shot him a look and he put up his hand in surrender, "Okay, okay, how about we both just...don't lie to each other anymore. I need you to be honest with me so I know when something is wrong. We both need to talk more, I'm serious about that."

"I know," Peter said quietly, and he nodded. "What about you telling Steve to go behind my back and make sure I didn't kill Ross? We can talk about that."

"Well when you put it that way, I know I made the right call," Tony grinned. "I'm not apologizing for that. I did it because I knew if he touched you, I would lose it, and everything we had worked for, even getting that far, I would ruin it all. I would not have gone easy on him, and then my custody rights would have definitely been stripped."

"Well when you put it that way, it sounds like you were protecting Ross," Peter teased to show him that he wasn't mad. Ever since they had gotten back, he had seen the little moments of where Tony put him first, or protected him, and he understood them better now. He wasn't about to pounce on him for it, because Peter had been willing to do the same. They were starting to get back to the point where they accepted the fact that they would do anything for each other, but weren't as pissed about it, at least not until it was something major- which Peter prayed never happened again for Tony's sake.

"Oh come on, if we hadn't gotten to see the look on his face when he was told he was fired, or when I punched him? It all would have been for nothing. You got to punch him, it was only right I got to too," Tony sniffed in defense.

Peter chuckled as he moved over to his side and handed him the piece he had fixed, leaning against the counter. He shoves Tony in the shoulder with his good arm, just to spite him since the man hadn't gotten his cast off yet and declares, "Well next time, I'm getting to Steve first."

"I think Steve hates being in the middle of these sort of things," Tony snickers, sliding the iPad over to Peter so he can check his numbers.

Peter's looking the opposite direction but he still stops it with his hand and picks it up with a sigh, starting to scroll as he hops up onto the counter, Tony rolling his eyes at his choice of seating. "All the more reason to put him in the middle," the kid grins, narrowing his eyes as he does mental math.

"So is my contact name dad yet?" Tony joked, clicking a few numbers and testing the stabilizer which lifted a couple inches off the surface of the counter.

"No, it's Tony Stank and will forever be Tony Stank and you won't get me to change it because I know it annoys the crap out of you," Peter said stubbornly with a smirk.

"Aren't kids supposed to be nice to their fathers?" Tony mumbled angrily.

Peter shrugged, "Some." He reached and tossed him the wire stripper Tony had just realized he needed before he could ask him to get it. Then the boy frowned and spoke thoughtfully, "Hey, what's my contact?"

"Pete," Tony said simply and Peter was almost disappointed; he had expected something-

Then FRIDAY's voice rang out, *"Pete, with the addition of: Heir to Stark Industries. 'Kid'. Lego/Star Wars nerd. Spidey-man. Don't give him energy drinks."*

Tony looks up at the ceiling and gives his A.I. an angry smile, "Thank you FRIDAY."

"My pleasure," she responded sweetly.

"What, do you work at Chick-Fil-A now?" Tony grumbled, shaking his head.

Peter scowled at him in regards to his contact which had now been revealed, "Kid?"

"It's your legal nickname," Tony shrugged in defense.

"And what's wrong with energy drinks?" Peter spluttered, setting down the iPad.

"You're hyper enough," Tony laughed, ruffling his hair as he walked by, crossing the room to stand by a 3D screen, swiping the data to the side with his good arm.

Peter tapped a screwdriver against his palm and looked up suddenly, confused why this wasn't the first thing he had called Tony out on. He shouted nervously, "Heir to Stark Industries?"

Tony smiled and didn't answer, going to the other side of the lab with a knowing smirk. With wide eyes, Peter practically fell off the counter and stumbled over his own feet as he ran after him, repeating more firmly, "Tony- heir of- Tony!"

Chapter End Notes

tadaaaaaaaaaa well thats just adorable.

ANYWAY- I PROMISE: next chapter is like 50% school so if you are wanting more of that, coming right up I promise and i honestly cannot wait to write it muhahahah
Ummmm ok let me think of what else I can tease.....

hmmmmm iron dad? yeah theres iron dad and then maybe just maybe....a sneak peak of Toomes. :) oh and Peter and Tony driving because thats been a reoccurring thing in the past couple stories that I just cant get enough of

So next chapter is also gonna be a blast and hopefully no tears (look at me go were slowing down the angst train for a slight bit)

I really hope you enjoyed this chapterrrrr please please please tell me what you thought I love hearing from you guys and i really appreciate feedback and comments and everything lol yall rock

So next chapter will be out ASAP probs same time frame like 5 days. This is most likely the last chapter ill be able to crank out before *big deep breath because ew* school. so posting may be a lil late once it starts depending how virtual goes! If they give us no work like 4th quarter than well be chill XD idk how its going for yall but hang in there.

Ok uhhhhhhh I need coffee, and sleep, and a million dollars but when do we get what we want? I'll settle for coffee.

Have an awesome week you amazing people, thank you again, and I will see you next time! Stay tuned and stay healthy my friends :)

I love you 3000 <3

Chapter Notes

HelLLLLLLLLllloooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo lovely readers!!!! Hi. Hello. Ladies and gentlemen its a long one, i think because i hit 10k and then i was like crap well i have to add this part >:) WeLp Im GoInG OvEr XD

Is this a little earlier than expected? I have no idea. Anyway, so.....I lied. I am sorry. I said there would be driving this chapter but i made a decision Toomes > driving because...plot XD it was a must. Driving will be next chapter right away I promise hahaha

Okay so this chapterrrrrrrrrrrrrrr i had such a blast writing it and wanted to get it out today because its the *sob* last day before I go to school. yay me. A lot of you have been saying that Flash is next on your list, well don't worry hes next on mine too so enjoy the chapter >) its mainly school, with a bit of Toomes, and some lovable Irondad because yes.

I am so so hyper today but it may not seem like it but im past the point of caps so thats how hyper. i drank coffee but i think its just all of my summer energy fizzing out which makes me sad. Im also watching a new show called designated survivor its great highly recommend and if youve seen it please lmk because snfkwejhjfjehwfew. ANYWAY, yall are amazing this just hit 31 k and im absolutely floored. You guys are the best, your comments 100% MAKE my freaking day and i appreciate all of your support and comments and kudos. This is the last chapter before the home stretch guys, so enjoy XD im not even kidding crap is about to go down towards the end of next chapter and then it's just.....chaos. idk how else to describe it w o spoilers which are bad so thats a NO!

Oh but also special guest star this chapter for one last hurrah because we all hate him :))))))

Read on you awesome peopleeeeeeeeeeeeeee! and happy labor day for my fellow peeps in the US <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Which one of you did it?" Pepper asked with a sigh as she entered and stood in the middle of the kitchen, holding up half of a broken vase, her other hand on her hip. It was 7 in the morning, and everyone was up. Peter was at one of the stools at the bar, Tony next to him drinking coffee.

The rest of the Avengers were scattered around the kitchen and they all turned to look at the woman with fiery red hair and a 'don't lie to me' expression on her face. She raised an eyebrow and everyone shifted uncomfortably.

"One of you is gonna get it," Natasha snickered, going back to the magazine she was reading.

Bucky was sneaking towards the door since he had been already leaning against the wall and Pepper snapped and pointed without even looking at him, "Nu uh. Sit."

"Yes ma'am." He sank back into his seat next to Steve.

Pepper scanned the faces of the Avengers who looked more scared than guilty. It was none of them

so that meant...

Peter and Tony were minding their own business at the bar, and they hadn't said a word. Pepper narrowed her eyes, slowly turning around. In sync, Peter and Tony stole a gaze behind them at probably the worst moment they could, making eye contact with her before whipping their heads back with wide eyes.

"I think she saw us," Peter whispered to him, rubbing the back of his head.

"No crap," Tony hissed. He took a sip from his coffee cup and resisted the urge to glance behind him again. He knew the look on Pepper's face and he didn't really want to look at it at the moment. His fiancée was scary when she was mad.

"Shhh," Peter hit his shoulder, making him slosh a bit of coffee over his hand.

"You shhh," Tony countered angrily, cursing as he licked the side of the cup before the hot drink could get on the counter.

They both straightened as Pepper tapped her foot on the floor. Slowly, they spun in their chairs and met her eyes. Tony set the cup down and flashed a smile, hoping to smooth things over with his look. "It was an accident."

"Well obviously," Peter grumbled. "I sure hope you didn't do it on purpose."

"We," Tony turned to him, before looking at Pepper and motioning to the two of them. "We," he corrected.

Peter slapped his hand away and put his up in surrender, "I was not the one who fired it, don't drag me into this."

Pepper crossed her arms, the broken vase hanging from her pinky. She shrugged and asked, "And when were you gonna tell me about this accident?"

"I was...going to make you an omelet and tell you," Tony laughed nervously.

"Uh huh," Pepper said, unimpressed; she had heard that before.

"FRIDAY order a replica vase and get it as quickly as possible," Tony grinned at his fiancée.

"Already on it's way."

"Much better," she smiled sweetly.

"Abort, abort mission," Tony hissed to Peter. The kid obeyed, slipping off his chair and Tony lunged to give Pepper a quick peck on the cheek before scurrying after him, grabbing his coffee mug and taking a big gulp so it didn't spill.

They made it back to the lab, laughing still and Peter checked his watch, realizing it was already time to leave for school, "Crap, we gotta go. Backpack, I need my backpack."

Tony was brought back to a little over three months ago, the memory still fresh in his brain. He found his voice and said, "Behind the far counter."

"But I didn't go over there," Peter shook his head, searching near his work station where they had stayed until almost 1 in the morning last night.

"I'll bet you fifty," Tony said with a small smile.

If Peter hadn't been caught by nostalgia a couple minutes before, he was now. The kid straightened, a ghost of a smile on his face as he remembered better days. He nodded and walked across the lab, leaning to check behind the counter when he sighed, grabbing his bag by the top strap and heaving it over his shoulder. As he walked past Tony who had a triumphant smile he shook his head, "Not a word, Tony."

Tony put up his hands in defense, "I didn't say anything."

"Well you looked like you were going to," Peter muttered with a smirk. He grabbed the keys on the ledge and tossed them behind him, Tony catching them as he turned off the lights.

"You got all your homework done?" Tony asked once they got in the car, checking the time as he put on his seatbelt. He gave Peter a look and the boy sighed, bringing it over his chest.

Then the teen nodded, "Yeah, I have to finish one more test today and then I'm all caught up. I've got a lot next week though so I'm probably gonna have to skip a lab night to study."

Tony pouted out his lower lip as he palmed the wheel and sped out of the garage, "You're gonna leave me all alone?"

"You can handle it," Peter laughed as he zipped up his backpack and shoved it at his feet, running a hand through his hair. "You get sleep last night?"

Tony shrugged, "An hour or two. My side kept me up. I think Tylenol just decided not to work anymore, which is really great, I appreciate the timing."

"It's healing though, right?" Peter asked nervously.

Tony nodded, looking over with a small smile as he turned around one of the many curves of the driveway, "Yeah, kid. With the tissue regeneration tech we have, I should be fine in a week. I don't heal as fast as you, Pete, that's why it seems like I'm doing worse. Your burns are almost gone, right?"

Peter makes a face and subconsciously rubs his side, flinching as he passes over one of the many sore spots. "Yeah, a few of them left scars but they're mostly healed."

Tony hates those flinches. He sees them a lot, when others don't notice it. Constant reminders that what happened was real, and that it would never really end, because he was never able to get away. Tony hated that for Peter. He looked over once he got onto a long stretch of road that headed into the city and asked, "You look tired. Did *you* get any shut eye last night?"

"Same as you," Peter said truthfully, scratching his arm. "An hour or two, which is good compared to some other nights. You really need to start letting me drink coffee. If I keep this up, I'll fall asleep in class."

"That's your argument?" Tony grinned.

"Yes, yes it is and it's pretty solid," Peter laughed.

Tony rolled his eyes and pushed the button for the radio, since they were trying to get back into old habits and blasting the radio was one of them. *"But it's my destiny to be the king of pain. There's a little black spot on the sun today, that's my soul up there-"*

Both he and Peter reached and slammed the off button, their fists colliding. Silence filled the car as the song cut off jarringly.

It was Peter who spoke after about two minutes of silence, and his voice was shaky, "Damian really sucked at singing."

"Dames, were you dropped as a baby?" Tony asked, cocking his head. The man didn't answer. Instead he was humming King Of Pain, off key, Tony might add. "The Police? Really?" he snorted. Damian again didn't answer and after another minute of the song Tony rolled his eyes and audibly groaned. "Peter, shut him up. Make him stop, please."

"You think he listens to me?" Peter demanded. "It's a miracle we've gotten this far. Why don't you get into an argument with him?" he suggested with a glare that didn't seem faked. "That will shut him up."

Tony tried to muster a laugh and found he couldn't, so he settled on a halfhearted chuckle, managing to respond with, "Yeah he did."

He kept his eyes straight, knuckles white on the steering wheel. It was horrible to know that something so small, not even a one minute memory, could bring back so much fear and pain. He remembered Peter's eyes filled with tears as the man cut into his arm. He looked to his right and saw the boy self consciously rubbing his shoulder, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. At that reminder, his shoulder suddenly started to sting too and Tony blinked harshly as he felt his muscles tense like they did when the knife ripped through them, sinking into his skin. He flexed his hand in his arm that was wrapped in a cast.

Then balancing his bad arm on the wheel he reached and ruffled the kid's hair, "You good, Pete?"

Peter took a shaky breath, calmed by his assuring action and nodded slowly. "Yeah. Yeah, I'm- I'm good."

"I never liked that song anyway," Tony said firmly. After sitting in silence, Tony decided to bring up something he didn't really want to, but he knew it would cheer the kid up. "So Spiderman..."

Peter looked over with a raised brow and asked curiously, "What about him?"

"Well I didn't know when the city would expect the vigilante in spandex to be back?" Tony wondered, hiding a small smile.

Peter looked a little deflated and muttered, "Well Damian had my suit and- well, I never got it, so it's probably burned by now. Or buried in rubble. Last time I saw it was when he was running it through his fingers." Peter's voice had a bite to it and Tony saw his hands curl on his thighs.

"And who says I don't have a back-up?" Tony says slowly, providing the much needed turn in direction from where this had been going.

A massive smile appears on Peter's face as he whips around to look at him, "You're kidding?"

"Yes, I'm messing with you-" Tony rolls his eyes. "No, kid, of course I made two. You also have the Iron Spider one if you want that one," he said with a happy shrug. "Heck," Tony admitted, "By the end of high school you're gonna have a closet full of different suits."

"Wait, you mean it though? I can use both of those?" Peter asked, his eyes wide.

Tony snorted, "Well I can't fit into them, yeah. I just didn't want to tell you too early cause you were still healing and I wasn't able to walk. But...you're...getting better and I can get in the suit if I really need to, so I figured you would want to start back up."

Peter looked happier than he's seen him in a while and he nodded, "I- I did Tony, thanks." Of course he did. He knew him.

"Just no free periods, okay? At least not yet," Tony says, trying to keep his voice from shaking and his eyes from showing the fear he was feeling. "Just small patrols-"

"I know," Peter insisted, interrupting him with an eager nod.

"Don't cut me off while I'm putting down guidelines," Tony shoots him a look. "Small patrols. And if you get hurt, you're done for the night. You find somewhere safe to stay put and I will come get you. Nothing too big, and *boundaries*." Peter rolls his eyes and slumps in his seat. Tony shakes his head, "Nu uh, don't give me that. We're taking precautions for a little bit, and we're easing into this, got it?" Peter mumbled something and Tony turned, repeating more firmly, "Got it?"

"Got it, *dad*," Peter groaned. "Is it too late to go to one of those government agencies?" He was kidding and Tony knew it because of the annoyed smirk that was covering his happiness.

"Be my guest, maybe I'll get a new kid who backs me up next time I break one of Pepper's vases," Tony counters and Peter turns with his jaw dropped, trying not to break into a smile.

"I hate you," Peter swears with a laugh.

"No you don't Pete. Please, don't say that. It breaks my heart," Tony drawls, rolling his eyes, the familiarity of the sentence clicking in before it's too late.

"I literally hate you," Peter repeats with a small giggle, and then he stops- freezes, more accurately, his gaze flicking to the floor, smile fading- dying.

Tony stops too. They had said that before their fight, their last good memory before everything went down hill. It was utter hell from then on, and Tony believes that was the last time he and the kid had truly smiled at each other with no grudges, no anger behind their gazes, and no arguments. But now there was context. Now there were times when they *had* hated each other, when they had said that same sentence with a look in their eyes that had no love and no indication that what they were saying was anything but the hard truth. It just wasn't the same anymore, and Tony hated the constant reminder.

They made it to the high school about four minutes later and Peter reaches for the handle, pushing the door open and slipping his arm in his backpack. Neither knew what to say, so they both just gave each other a quick look.

Peter shuts the door and pats the inside of the car through the open window, "Thanks for the ride, Tony." Then he turns and walks for the steps.

"Hey," Tony calls after him before he can stop himself. The kid stops in his tracks, looking over his shoulder. Tony can't tell if there are tears in his eyes but he can read the pain on his face and knows Peter sees the same in his. He tries to find words, but his eyes say more than the two words he manages to get out. "Be safe." He still needs the words because the gaze doesn't do as much as it used to, but he convinces himself that that's just a step in the right direction.

Peter gives him a nod and then walks for the steps. Tony watches him for a couple seconds, making sure he finds one of his friends before he puts the car in drive and rolls up the window. By the time Peter looks back, the street is empty.

"And if we are able to know the mass from looking at this diagram, then can anyone tell me how to find x , using the information we got from calculating- yes, Flash?" his teacher points at the boy in the third row who's hand flies up before she's even completed her sentence.

Peter is staring at his desk, his hands curled into fists, knuckles white. He can barely breathe, his chest tight, throat closing. Ned notices and his brow furrows. Eyes up front, he leans over and nudges his shoulder, making Peter jump. "Hey, you good?"

"Yeah," Peter whispers tightly. No. No he's not okay. He's feeling his wrists cuffed behind him again, he's feeling the shattering of his arm by the man he fears and hates more than anyone in the world, he's feeling the shock as the tip of the prod is dug in between his ribs, making him jolt in his seat. Peter tries to pry his fingers apart, squeezing his eyes shut and sucking in a breath.

Damian is dead.

Toomes is dead.

Snap out of it Peter.

"No Flash, close, but not quite. Let's see- Peter? You with us?" his teacher's eyes find his and Peter tenses, everything spiraling back. For a second, everything goes bright white and he has to blink a couple of times to steady himself. His hands are shaking but he manages to swallow and focus on the board, forcing his mouth and voice to work in harmony.

" X would be the product of mass and then the final volume. But if you- if you wanted to figure out sine, you would need the original measurements," he says, focusing everything he has to keep his voice from wobbling like it wants to.

His teacher gives him a quick smile and nods, "Exactly. Well done, Peter. And thank you for that tid bit, that was actually going to be my next question but it appears you are ahead of the game. Glad to have you back with us." Then her expression changes and she sighs, "Flash, maybe take a little more time working on the problem than trying to be the first one."

Peter flinches and sees the bully turn around with murder in his eyes, cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Peter, already exhausted, sinks lower in his seat as the bully locks gazes with him and winces as the boy swears, "You're dead Parker."

Peter shuts his eyes again and presses his lips together hard, clenching his teeth and jaw to stop from letting out whatever sound he was about to. His hand reaches and grasps the empty table and Peter feels his heart drop. He wonders why and when he figures it out, his hands clench in despair.

He would reach for Tony. That entire week, whenever he was in this position and felt like he was drowning in pain, in fear, he would reach for Tony. He would reach for him despite everything, when there was no one else, or when there was, just to curl his hand around his arm, sleeve, shirt, jacket, whatever was there. It was a desperate attempt to feel safe, and it was a cry of trust and dependency.

And now Tony wasn't here.

And Peter felt alone. And with that awful feeling, came three months of pain that was buried deep, but still a closing wound, when he had felt the same pit in his stomach.

"Peter, breathe," Ned insisted, keeping a wary eye on anyone who looked near them, trying not to draw attention for once because he knew how serious this was. "Eleven minutes of class left, you can do it."

"I can't-" Peter hisses back, trying not to let misdirected anger seep into his tone as he presses his palms to his head, memories starting to flood. Damian smiles as he plunges the knife into Tony's shoulder, Peter gets shoved up against the wall, the cold stone pressing against his back, Tony slams limply into the ground, soaking wet and medically dead-

Ned yanks out his phone and feverishly texts something, setting it down once he's done and patting his friend on the back who is still dealing with the horrors that came from the past couple days, "One minute, tops."

"I thought you said eleven," Peter whispers harshly, his mouth opening in a cry of pain that he keeps silent. He flinches internally as he pictures him slamming the cell phone against the ground and watching it shatter as dread eats at his stomach. His side is suddenly throbbing and his eyes widen as he hears the gun shot, the bullet sinking into May's head- no- Tony's chest. Ned is slowly packing his backpack and Peter weakly grasps at his arm in confusion, desperate to try and focus on anything but his nightmares.

"Change of plans. Trust me, dude. Okay?" Ned insists, patting his hand and shoving the rest of his things in Peter's bag.

Just as he says that, the door opens and MJ peaks in, holding up a piece of paper, "I have a pass for Peter Parker? Principal Morita wants to see him."

His teacher nods and her eyes find Peter who manages to look like he's not dying, but rather surprised that his name is called. If there's anything he's learned this past week it's to hide his pain. It's not a good thing, he knows that, but he can't help it. His teacher checks her watch, deems it reasonable, and asks, "Peter, you know the homework?"

"Yes ma'am," Peter says weakly, managing to glance up.

"Have a good rest of your day. Glad to have you back." She nods towards the door with a smile and Ned hoists the backpack onto his back. Peter gives him a look of gratitude and then just prays his knees don't buckle as he reaches the door.

MJ holds it open as he walks through, yanking it shut behind them. The minute it closes and they're out of sight of the small window, Peter feels his legs give out and he just drops like dead weight. MJ tries to catch him, fisting his jacket and arm, leaning him against the wall as Peter curls on himself. "Peter, Peter- hey-" her eyes go wide with concern as she supports him.

"S-sorry," he mutters, trying to get his legs to work, tears building in his eyes as he fights past the nightmares flooding his brain. This wasn't supposed to happen while he was awake, but it was. It had been, but this was the first time Peter couldn't just shove it down and let it build up. Or maybe he had tried to again but there was just no room and now it was all spilling out.

"Peter, hey, lets just get to the corner lounge, it's down the hall, come on-" she urges, slipping his arm over her shoulder. Peter nods weakly and tries to take some of his own weight, every fiber in his body wanting to curl up, put his hands over his ears, and duck his head into his chest to just make it stop. But Tony would tell him to keep going, May would tell him to keep going-

So they made it to the lounge, MJ setting Peter down so he could push himself against the wall, pulling his backpack off of him to relieve the extra weight. With him safely on the ground, she locked the door and shut the blinds. Turning around and wincing at the pure pain and fear in Peter's eyes, she crouches at his side, hand on his shoulder, trying to get him to recognize that he was not wherever his mind was convincing him he was. "Peter, Peter, focus. You need to calm down."

"I- I can't," Peter gasps, rubbing his eyes. He feels the knife drag down his arm and he grits his teeth, clasping his hand over his shoulder, throwing his head back in pain as he arches his back.

"Peter, look at me," she says firmly, her hand brushing his cheek to pull his gaze down. "You're in school. You're safe. *Snap out of it.*"

Peter sucks in a breath, blinking. Her harsh tone sank deep and his eyes widened as his gaze snaps towards her. He nods slowly, his hand curling around his sleeve with a slight wince. Her hand falls away from the side of his face in embarrassment and her eyes lower, falling to his injured arm where her gaze softens.

Without speaking, MJ's hand folds over his and she moves it away, gently pulling his sleeve up. She purses her lips when she sees the thin scars, and for a second she's at a loss for words.

Peter yanks his sleeve down and pushes himself away across the ground, leaning against the opposite wall, "Yeah- I know-" he makes out with disgust and embarrassment.

"Peter-" she says quietly, staying where she is and respecting his need for space.

"I don't want your sympathy, okay?" he makes out.

"Well good, because I didn't just drag you down a hallway to give you chocolate and tissues," she countered angrily.

Peter looks up in slight surprise before he realizes she's right. This was MJ. She treated him like he was a normal person, and was not one for all the lovey dovey compassionate crap Peter hated. He gave her a guilty look and mumbled, "Good. Sorry." Then he frowns. "How did you know-"

MJ pulls out her phone, sinking down across from him. One knee up, the other stretched out, she slides her phone across the carpet. Peter picks it up with a shaking hand and sees a message under the contact **Ned (Loser)**.

SOS

"We each have a pass for you- I stole them from the principal's office a while ago. SOS is something we made up for when things got bad and you needed an out. Like now," she explained. "We knew if you freaked during class people would ask questions and...well that wouldn't end well."

Peter slides her phone back and manages a smile, "No it wouldn't." He can't believe his friends would do that for him- yes he did. They had always been there for him, through thick and thin. This was not a shock. "Thanks. That- that means-"

"Save it," MJ rolled her eyes with a grin as she tucks her phone back into her jean pocket and brushes hair out of her face. There was silence for a bit and then she looked back at him through her bangs. "So your arm..." she says slowly.

"You weren't supposed to see that," Peter's voice is soft, looking down in embarrassment. He self

consciously tugs the sleeve down lower.

"Peter what they did to you- it's not something to be ashamed of," she said, almost...furiously.

Peter made a face and shook his head, running a hand through his hair, "I know...I just-

"I get it," she nods, and he believes her. MJ snorts, "You're talking to the one person who likes to hide almost everything about them. I'm very mysterious, so I respect it."

Peter manages a smile, "Yeah and I still like you." He freezes and backtracks at her widened eyes, "Not like- I didn't mean- I just meant you're still my friend, that's all. Not- yeah..."

"Yeah," she says in agreement, looking off to the side. She notices his clenched hand shaking every so often and he doesn't like that she notices it. Usually only Tony notices it- Ned when Peter isn't trying to conceal it. But she still noticed and asks, "You okay?"

"Better than I was a couple minutes ago," he chuckles, trying to deflect the question.

"Yeah no crap, you're talking in complete sentences," she agrees. Then her gaze falls to that of concern again and she sighs, "But are you sure coming back this early is-

"These aren't going to go away," Peter says, mad with how quiet and weak his voice comes across. He tries to strengthen it. "They will never go away, I'll just get better at dealing with them. Whether I came back a month from now or not, I'll be in the same boat, so why not try and learn how to navigate sooner than later?"

"My God, you really are Tony's son," MJ rolls her eyes.

Peter frowns, hiding a smile, "What does that mean?"

"I dreaded the day you spoke in analogies, and here it is," MJ frowns, shaking her head.

Peter smirks, lowering his head and protesting, "It was one time."

"Fine," she admits with a rare grin, killing it right after. The bell suddenly rings loudly, making them both jump and Peter sucks in a breath. She looks at the clock and says slowly, "I can stay-

"No," Peter shakes his head and weakly waves his hand. "I'll be okay." She stands and he tries to follow suite, using the couch to ease himself up. His leg buckles and suddenly MJ is there, Peter's cheeks turning red as pain flares in his side. She sets him straight up and he forces his legs to lock, hand on her arm.

MJ's holding his shoulder and they exchange gazes. She smirks, "You sure you're gonna be fine?"

"Yeah, that was another one time thing," he assures her with a smile. They suddenly blink and MJ unravels her arm, stepping back and Peter awkwardly clears his throat, scratching his neck. He gestures messily, "Well you have to...go to class..."

"Yeah," she nods, slinging her backpack over her shoulder and lifting his, handing it over. "Take care of yourself, k? I'll see you for lunch, don't go dying before then."

"I'll try not to," he admits as she opens the door and gives him a nod. "MJ...thanks."

"Yeah, whatever," she rolls her eyes but turns away to hide a smile.

Ned bursts in a second later, waving to MJ who gives him an L sign. He turns and Peter can't wipe

his grin off his face. His friend crosses his arms and raises his eyebrows, "Well you look much better."

"Shut up," Peter says, swinging his bag onto his back with difficulty and pushing past him through the door.

He begins to head down the hallway but Ned grabs his backpack and shakes his head, "Flash is waiting for you that way. We should go in the back door to the chem classroom."

Peter sighed, "Of course he is."

Peter knew Flash was going to corner him eventually. He and Ned made sure to get out right as the bell rang, avoiding the bully who went straight to Peter's class in hopes to catch him before he got out. But when they made it to the cafeteria, he knew he was done for. Peter slid into his seat, MJ moving her leg aside, buried in a book.

She looked up and raised an eyebrow, "Well you're not dead."

"Not yet," Ned murmured. "Flash has it out for him today."

"Only a matter of time before he wipes the floor with me," Peter said with a fake smile, running a hand through his hair. MJ frowned and gave him a look and Peter shrugged, "I've been away like two weeks and before that I let him push me around for months. What else do you expect?"

"He's looking at you," Ned said nervously, glancing sideways at the table that the bully was sitting at across the middle isle of the cafe. Peter flicked his gaze over and gulped, locking eyes with Flash for barely a second.

The boy stood, a couple of his friends clapping his hands as he made his way across the cafeteria, spinning a basketball on his finger. Peter ducked his head down and squeezed his eyes shut, wishing he could be anywhere else in the world. A jolt in his side made him snap back to reality and he hissed in pain as Flash bounced the basketball off his bad shoulder, hard. "You, Parker, have been avoiding me."

Peter flinched and curled his fists, "What do you want, Flash?"

"I want an apology," Flash said casually, throwing the ball at Peter's head this time, who winced as it smacked against it. He resisted the urge to rub his curls.

"Knock it off, Flash," MJ growled dangerously before gesturing to the ball. "You're not even on the team. What, you just carry it around all day?"

Flash grinned at her and spun it on his finger again, "Well I seem to be skilled with it."

He hit it against Peter's back and he flinched again, before muttering, "Flash, all I did was answer a question." His voice sounded weaker than he expected and he hated it. He immediately clamped his lips shut, staring at the table.

Flash snorted and pushed Peter's backpack to the ground, taking a seat next to him, facing the opposite direction, "No, no. *All you did*, was make me look like an idiot. And I don't appreciate that. Especially since you've been gone."

"So what, Peter comes back and suddenly he threatens your intelligence?" MJ says slowly.

"Sounds like you need to study more."

"Stay out of this Michelle," Flash snaps, turning his gaze back to Peter who still hasn't looked at him. He snaps a finger in Peter's face and snorts at the flinch, "A lot jumpier than the last three months. What happened while you were on vacation in the Bahamas?"

"Isn't that Peter's business?" Ned piped up, trying to defend him.

"I don't know, did I ask you, Leeds?" Flash demanded, shooting down his friend instantly with a harsh glare. He turned and clapped Peter on the shoulder, smirking, "Don't worry, you can tell me, Peter."

Peter's fists slowly began to curl and he took a shaky breath, looking away, only to get a harsh palm to his bad shoulder. Peter's eyes screwed shut and his hand went to clasp his hurt arm, blinking through the pain.

"What? You become a wimp in a week too?" Flash asked. More and more people were looking over at the spectacle he was creating and Flash spread his hands. "I just want to know what happened? You were pretty ballsy in the hallway the other day. Did all that confidence just die?" Peter didn't answer and Flash snickered, "Well something happened to ya, Parker!" He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and asked quietly, "Is it about your aunt?"

"Shut up," Peter growls lowly. His eyes narrow and he curls his fists.

Flash rolls his eyes and pushes Peter, forcing him to turn around in his seat so he doesn't fall backward. When that doesn't instigate him, he manually does it by gripping his collar and pulling him up. Peter stands with him, locking eyes with the boy who grins, "Come on, have some fun, Pete."

"Don't you say a word about my aunt," Peter snarls furiously, and that's when he finally looks the bully in the eyes, slamming his palm into Flash's arm that's got a grip on his shirt. He felt the pain of hearing the gunshot through the phone, and he remembered his heart being clenched as he tipped the shovel over onto the grave. And he would not allow anyone to make fun of that.

"You're that trash of a human being that you make fun of someone who loses a family member?" Flash falters at that as the audience watching settles down at the reality of it. But as soon as it's lit, Peter's fire is soon extinguished at his command. "And it's *Peter*," he adds quietly, not wanting to escalate the situation, because he knows if he does, he'll snap. Peter bends down and grabs his backpack, reaching for the books that spilled out so he can shove them back in the bag. Maybe since everyone around recognized Flash's low blow, he would stop.

"Okay, okay, fine, Tony Stark then," Flash rebounds after a second of silence. Peter freezes, giving the bully enough time to kick one of his textbooks away from his reaching hand. It slides across the floor and by now the cafeteria is silent, all eyes on the bully.

"You lost the Stark Internship you claim to have," Flash says mockingly, bending down to Peter's level. "I don't even understand why Tony would want some kid like you- I mean, even if he did hire you, which he didn't, I'd probably fire you on the spot. He probably saw what a joke you were and walked out."

Peter stopped breathing and he practically falls forward on his hands while reaching for his book.

"I'm not walking out that door," Peter says after a minute planting his feet, tears in his eyes. "Go for it. Walk away. If you want this so bad, walk away."

Tony stares at him in pain and he clenches his teeth. Then he turns around and slowly makes his way up the steps to the lab.

He walks out the door.

He did walk out. Flash was right. And through Peter's reaction, he knows it.

The bully laughs and bounces on his heels, "He walked out on you! You know what, maybe the internship was real because that's just too good to pass up! Tony Stark *walked out on you*."

"Stop it, Flash," Peter growls, and it's almost a warning. He shoves what he can into the bag and stands.

"I feel like we've already addressed that, but I'll just say it again, because part of you still thinks the guy cares for you! Let me- let me get this straight. You really think he gives a crap about you?" Flash marvels, and some people around him snicker, which only fuels his attention craving fire. Peter attempts to move past him and the bully presses a hand against his chest, smirking as he stops him in his tracks, "And now there's a rumor that he's your father? That's probably your doing, trying to make yourself feel better about the fact that he probably doesn't even know your last name."

"Flash, I'm warning you right now," Peter says quietly, making weak eye contact with him. "Stop." He's pleading him to, but not in the way Flash thinks he is.

MJ and Ned know the difference and they watch him carefully. Feeling their worried eyes on them, he gives them a subtle shake of his head. If things got ugly they needed to stay out of this, but Peter was confident he could leave this room without breaking, or worse, snapping- two totally different things.

"Oh, you're warning me! He's warning me," Flash said loudly with a laugh before his face falls. "Luckily I don't follow the rules, I just think I hit a sweet spot. Tony Stark doesn't care about you, he never has, and he never will, and you're playing yourself trying convince yourself that he does." Peter shoves past him angrily, keeping his eyes to the ground, not worrying about the textbook he left. He just needed to get out of there.

He takes about four steps when Flash says, "He's a crap human being anyway. He doesn't care about anyone."

Peter stops. He turns around and whispers, "What did you just say?"

Flash seems surprised that *this* is the instigating jab that gets under Peter's skin, but goes with it anyway, "Yeah, Tony Stark? He's in his tower with all of his fancy toys with no need to come out other than to throw up a few peace signs and say some sarcastic comments to reporters."

"Shut up," Peter hisses dangerously. His vision had been slowly tunneling over the past couple minutes, his blood starting to heat up. But now he could feel it boiling in his veins, his chest hot, his vision just plain red.

"You're defending Tony Stark?" Flash scoffs with a laugh. "He's a billionaire, a playboy."

"I said shut up, Flash," Peter repeats, his tone laced with venom now, his chest starting to heat.

"He doesn't need to care about anyone, because why should he?" Flash scoffs. "He just saves the world when he needs to because then otherwise he wouldn't make money."

Peter turns around slowly and Flash takes that as victory, spinning to face the cafeteria as he spreads his hands and announces, "Once again, Penis Parker runs away from his problems-"

Peter simply shrugged the bag off of his shoulder and let it drop to the floor, curling his fists. Flash's friend's eyes widened but none of them really got out what they were trying to convey before it was too late. Flash's cocky expression contorted to that of confusion before he was tackled around the waist. Peter threw himself at the bully, launching both of them off their feet. He slammed him into the ground with fury, and they go sliding across the floor.

"I said *shut up*, Eugene," Peter growls, slamming a sloppy elbow into his jaw. Well that pisses him off. No one uses Flash's real name and there are a couple gasps from the people close enough to hear Peter but word soon spreads, bringing students to their feet. "Don't you dare talk about Tony like that," he snarls.

Flash, trying to get his bearings in his absolute fury, shoved Peter away and scrambled to his feet in an attempt to create space. But Peter was already on him and he shoved the bully in the chest who staggered back into a table, the people there moving their food aside. Cheering started as students got out of their seats, and from what it looked like, everyone was either rooting for the sheer occurrence of a fight, or for Peter.

Flash had the nerve to laugh as Peter gripped the front of his shirt, eyes narrowed and dangerous. Peter pushed him harshly against the table and the bully said, "Wow, defending Tony Stark? Maybe he'll rethink firing you once he sees your puppy dog loyalty."

Peter sees the first coming and he decides to let it hit him, right across the jaw. His head snaps to the side and he puts his hand to his now split lip, smearing blood. Flash, who clearly thought that kind of force would knock Peter onto his back, is slightly scared when Peter's grip remains tight and he doesn't even stagger.

"Nice punch," Peter snarls, before yanking Flash up and throwing one of his own. He lands it right on his face, giving him an instant bloody nose as Flash stumbles into the middle of the cafeteria, letting out a furious grunt of pain. The boy's eyes find Peter and they darken as he charges, Peter putting up his fist and bracing as the boy grabs him. Peter twists as he falls, making sure it's Flash who lands with his extra momentum behind him.

"You're dead, Parker," Flash wheezes, trying to catch Peter in a headlock.

"Then kill me," Peter dares him, pulling him up a couple inches before slamming him into the ground again. Flash's eyes glint with pain and embarrassment and he knees Peter in the side, getting out from under him. Then it's a scrappy fight, Peter weaving around sloppy punches and giving as many solid ones as he can as they twist on the floor, shoving and flailing, wrestling to get the upper hand.

Flash's buddies eventually push their way in and drag Peter off of their leader. He gets yanked up and clocked across the face- an instant black eye, he knows it. By now, there's a circle formed of a screaming audience. Peter, Flash, and his two friends are in the middle of it. Peter twists out of their grip but one of the boys grabs his bad arm and he snarls in pain before bringing his other elbow down on his wrist and punching him in the face. The other attempts to tackle him and Peter sidesteps, taking out his ankle with a trip and sending him into the crowd. MJ happens to be there and 'accidentally' elbows him in the face before shoving him behind her into the crowd, people pushing him further and further back dismissively so they get a better look at the action.

Peter feels Flash grip his shirt and he twists, elbowing the bully across the face, locked in a battle of limbs until his bigger friend just slams into them both. Peter and Flash cry out as they land hard

on their side, the jock on top of them. He's clawing at Peter's arm, landing a punch to his ribs which legitimately hurts. Peter launches the friend off him with a kick to the chest and he goes flying, hitting a trash can and sinking to the ground as it topples over. Flash attempts to get up, scrambling against the floor and Peter reaches, curling a fistful of his shirt and swiping his legs out from under him, sending him crashing back down.

Flash grabs Peter around the waist and they begin wrestling on the ground, Peter kneeing him in the stomach. That's when they hear the yells of teachers coming from the doors of the cafeteria that had just burst open. The circle closes in on the two boys twisting on the floor, shouts of order heard barely behind the mob of students all yelling.

Peter refuses to back down and he slams his fist into Flash's face again, gripping his shirt as they squirm on the ground, Flash scratching at his arm and kicking at his legs. "Do whatever you want with this," Peter whispers angrily, getting nose to nose with his enemy, "but my last name is Stark. And Tony knows it."

Flash's eyes widen with fear and confusion and Peter relishes the look on his face. Three months ago, Peter wouldn't have had the guts to do this, but after being hurt so much by the people he hated, seeing them with that look on their face- Damian, Toomes, now Flash, it was satisfying. That should scare him, but it didn't, because Peter knew he had changed.

And he knew he had just put Flash in one of the worst positions possible. Keep what he had just told him a secret, and it would eat away at him forever. Admit it to a friend or the school, and he would be not only signing his own death warrant since Peter would now be the popular one, but he would be admitting he was wrong. It was a clear ultimatum because with the look in Peter's eyes, Flash knew he wasn't joking. This was the son of Tony Stark that had beaten the living crap out of him, and Peter would never let him forget it.

Peter and Flash lock limbs as they tumble across the cafeteria floor in a snarling frenzy, a chaos full of punches and desperation to get in some last hits before they were separated. Peter was really the only one landing his, Flash was cowering now.

"Break it up! Now!" The adults had finally broken through the circle, Ned and MJ accidentally standing in their way to buy him some time. Peter feels himself being pulled backward and he shoves Flash away from him, standing and yanking his arms out of the teacher's grasp.

"Who started it? Who?" the man demands, one of the history teachers. Flash, holding his bloody nose on the floor, starts screaming and pointing to Peter who is breathing hard, standing straight, eyes dark. "Parker, principal's office, now," the man demands threateningly, pointing to the door.

Peter takes one look at Flash and nods, turning around. The circle of wide eyed students parts instantly and Peter wipes his lip, walking straight through the mob of people. He bends down to pick up his backpack, his entire grade watching him, and slings it over his shoulder, eyes fierce. He doesn't say a word.

MJ meets him once he's halfway to the door and hands over the textbook she had picked up from the center, looking him over once. "Wow," she says quietly, her hand hovering over his shoulder and then chest, clearing her throat. "Nice punch?" she offers with a shrug.

Peter smirks as they start walking for the doors, "Thanks," he says, finding his voice before he looks at his bloody knuckles and huffs, "I'm so screwed." They walk through the cafe doors, the entire grade still watching in shock until they shut behind him.

"Nah," MJ says with a shake of her head as they start down the hallway; it's a short walk.

"Principal Morita likes you, and Flash was a piece of crap for going after May. He's been dropped too many times as a baby."

Peter wants to point out that Flash's jab to May wasn't the thing that sent him over the edge, but in all honesty, he was tired of fighting. He looks down at his bloodied shirt and sighs, "Well this isn't how I wanted today to go. But at least it can't get worse." MJ snorts and Peter looks over with wide eyes, "What?"

"Nothing, I mean, unless Tony is your emergency contact, which I'm pretty sure he is," she snickers.

Peter's face falls and he looks down at his shirt again, reaching to touch his busted lip. He blinks and it's sore; he already knows he's got a black eye forming, as well as a bloody nose. "Oh God."

"Once again, don't die," she winks as they reach the principal's office, Morita looking through the window and making unfortunate eye contact with Peter. MJ makes a face and pats him on the arm. "But good going out there tough guy."

Peter snorts quietly and mutters, "Thanks. I'll talk to you later?"

"Yeah," she laughs, giving his arm a slight rub as she brushes her hair behind her ear. "I'm gonna go make sure Ned isn't doing something stupid and trying to convince the teacher that you were under influence or something. He has stupid improvisational skills."

"That's a good idea," Peter smiles slightly as she waves and turns the corner. Then he curses under his breath and walks into the principal's office, his gaze falling on the phone he knows he's going to have to talk into in about five minutes.

Tony's in the lab, tinkering with some suit. "DUM-E, I swear to God, you even think about using the extinguisher and I am donating you to a city college," he threatens as the small panel sparks. He pushes away the helmet he was using and throws a screwdriver at the suit in exasperation. "You're a tough one darlin', aren't you? You just don't want to cooperate. I respect that. I'm stubborn too."

Then his phone rings and Tony sighs, plopping down in his chair before using it to roll his way across the lab, not looking at the name as he clicks the green button and holds it to his ear. "Yyyyyellow?"

"Hi."

There's a massive pause and Tony frowns as he responds slowly, "Hi?"

"It's Peter."

Tony smirks, rubbing the bridge of his nose as he sticks the phone between his shoulder and ear, "Yeah, I know it's Peter. What are you doing calling me from school?"

"I need you to pick me up."

Tony frowns again, thoughts running through his head. Peter didn't sound distressed, just nervous. There was no screaming or explosions going on the background- "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. You should see the other guy though- sorry, Principal Morita- sorry..."

It all clicks and Tony pieces it together, repeating, "Other guy- principal- did you get into a fight?" he exclaims, grabbing his jacket off the counter.

Short pause. Then the boy mumbles, *"Maybe."*

"Yes or no, Pete," Tony says in disbelief, his eyes wide, jaw dropped. He rolls over to the other counter and grabs his sunglasses.

"Your dad voice sucks."

"Parker," Tony growls, expression immediately changing. "Yes or no."

"Well it wasn't much of a fight...but yes."

Tony pauses, standing and walking towards the door of the lab, picking up his hat off the side of a chair on the way, "Well, did you win?"

"Yes."

"That's my boy," Tony grins, resisting the urge to pump his fist. As he passes DUM-E he gives him a look, covering the speaker and mouthing *my kid kicked some a-*

"I need you to pick me up."

"Yeah, I'm not deaf Pete, I heard you," Tony snorts. His hand stalls over his car keys and he looks behind him at the iron man suit which is ready to be flown, the eyes flicking on at his glance. "Suit or car, which one?"

"Car please."

"Fine," Tony sighs, grabbing his keys and starting for the garage. He takes the elevator and lets out a long sigh, holding back a smirk as he admits, "You know I'm very disappointed in you."

"I'm hanging up now."

Tony tisks, "I'm serious Peter, you should learn to behave yourself while at-" The line goes dead and Tony smirks, slipping his phone into his pocket as he puts on his sunglasses. "Well this should be fun."

Dressed in what Cap liked to say was 'civilian wear' (sunglasses, a thin jacket, a baseball cap, and jeans), Tony parked in front of the school and jogged up the steps, testing out his side which felt better. He opened up the door and made a beeline for the principal's office, his glasses already zooming in and seeing the back of Peter's head through the window. A second later he pushed open the door and immediately turns to the right, his gaze falling on the kid in the chair. Peter sat straighter, looking up at him guiltily.

Tony blinked. The boy had a split lip, bloody nose and knuckles, and black eye. His shirt was messy and stained too. "Well I can't imagine what the other guy must look like," Tony snorted and Peter gave him a look, flicking his eyes straight.

Tony turned and saw the principal standing there with his hands in his pockets, an amused expression on his face. Tony took off his hat and tapped his sunglasses so that they lost their tint and became clear. He held out his good hand and flashed a smile, "Hi. Tony Stark."

Principal Morita smirked and shook it, "Yes, sir. I- I know. To be perfectly honest, I didn't believe Peter for a second when he said who he was calling."

"Well you were wrong to underestimate him," Tony flashes a smile.

The principal nods and gives Peter an apologetic smile before turning his shocked gaze back to Tony, "I-I'm sorry I had to bother you-"

"It's not a bother," Tony assures him with a wave of his hand. "You mind telling me what happened?"

"Well as you can see," the man looked at the teen slumped in the chair with his arms crossed. "Peter...got into a fight with one of the students."

"Who started it?" Tony asked, his brow knitting with concern.

The man pursed his lips, "Peter threw the first punch, and...the last punch."

"Darn right he did," Tony grinned at the kid who shot him a look.

"But I know full well that the other student instigated it," The principal finished slowly. Then he addressed the boy directly with a soft gaze. "Which is why, Peter, I'm only giving you one week detention. You've got a good head on your shoulders and you've been through a lot. Just try and stay out of trouble, okay?"

Peter nodded and Tony put up his hand, "This other kid, the one who instigated it, he's getting in trouble too, right? I'd gladly talk to him if you want."

Principal Morita laughed lightly and shook his head, "There's no need for that Mr. Stark, I promise. But yes, he will face some consequences too. I hate to cut this short but, Peter's had a rough day, I have some calls to get to- he can go home now. If I remember his schedule correctly he just has a study hall block going on." Peter nods and the principal turns to Tony, shaking his hand again, "Thank you for picking him up, although I do hope we don't have to meet under these circumstances again. He's a great kid. One of the smartest students Midtown has."

"I know he is," Tony smiled. "And I know that the other kid probably deserved it, that cocky jack-" Peter cleared his throat loudly, shooting him another look as he spun around innocently. Tony cut himself off, smiling. "Sorry," Tony apologizes.

"Don't be. I'm a parent too," Principal Morita laughed, looking back and forth between to two of them. "Goodbye Mr. Stark. Peter." He gave a small nod and headed into the other room, shutting the door behind him.

Tony clicked his tongue and shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked around the room, looking at the awards on the wall. "If I sat in his chair, that would be rude, right?" he asks.

"Typically, yeah," Peter sighs.

"It just looks so comfy," Tony says sadly, gazing at it longingly.

"You didn't bring a suit, did you?" Peter asked weakly.

Tony turns and shakes his head, "No. Did you want me to? I can call one?"

He raises his palm and the kid's eyes widen, "No! God no. I just didn't want one bursting in or

anything."

Tony looks out the door and mutters, "Well I don't like those front windows...you know what I did to the window at the hospital-"

"Tony," Peter cuts him off and he snickers, raising his hands in surrender.

Then he eyes the kid and sobers his tone, asking slowly, "You okay?" He doesn't expect him to answer honestly, but he just wants to make sure he's okay.

Peter nods like Tony knows he would, prodding his split lip with his knuckle. "It's better than it looks." He motions to his shirt which has blood smeared on it and says confidently, "This isn't mine."

Tony makes a face and nods sarcastically, "Well that's comforting." He shifts his weight, leaning against the desk before shrugging, "Want to tell me what happened?"

Peter kicks his feet and mutters, "You heard what happened."

Tony rolls his eyes after staring at him for a second, pulling over a chair and straddling it, drumming his fingers on the sides. "I heard the professional version. I want to hear the Peter version. Because the kid I know wouldn't just punch someone just because he called you a name."

"Well maybe you don't know me," Peter grumbles, avoiding eye contact, his hand clutching his bad arm, Tony realized.

He sighs and rubs a hand over his face, muttering, "Kid, you still like pickle juice popsicles, I think it's safe to say you haven't changed until you grow out of those."

"They're good," Peter mumbles in protest before he shakes his head. "Look he just really really pissed me off and I was trying to walk out and then he said something about you and I just- I don't know, I tackled him. It happened really fast."

Tony straightens in surprise and asks with a smile, "You defended my honor?"

"I will knock you straight out of that chair, I swear to God-" Peter threatens.

Tony instantly falls back on his heels, shaking his head as he plants himself in the chair more firmly, "No, no I'm honored. But...did him just bashing me really piss you off that much?"

Peter runs a hand through his messy curls and shrugs, "I was already pissed about what Flash said about May-"

"It was Flash?" Tony raises his eyebrows and knits them at the same time as his surprise turns to anger. He knew the kid had had some trouble with him but Peter had always brushed it off. Over the past three months Peter had said he hadn't corrected him whenever the boy called him Pete, and seeing the pain on his face when he admitted that made him glad that Peter had clocked him one. But what was even more troubling was what he had just been bullied over. "He said something about May?" Tony gasped in utter disbelief.

Peter nodded miserably, but his expression only worsened, "Yeah. And it just really hurt, you know? Like...I couldn't stop her from getting hurt because of me again. And then he said that you walked out on me and I guess figured he hit close to home. Which he did," he kid admits, wringing his hands. "And that's when he said that I was just trying to convince myself that you cared about me when in actuality you didn't even know my last name."

Tony scoffed loudly at that. "And then," he urged gently, hoping to get another long jumble of words.

"And then he just went for you alright?" Peter said in annoyance, shooting him a glare, that didn't have much anger behind it- something Tony wasn't used to seeing. "He said some crap about you that got me pissed off so then I just-" Peter clapped his hands together once, mimicking his tackle before rubbing his neck. "I-"

"Decked him," Tony finished for him, blinking once.

Peter shrugged and nodded, "Y-yeah. *Hard*. Because I was just so mad, I don't know. H-his friends got in on it, and so, so I fought them too. I kicked one of them into a trash can I think, I'm not sure, I was concentrating on Flash."

"Good," Tony says firmly, giving him a proud thumbs up.

"And I- well...I beat the crap out of him-" he pauses and snaps his fingers against his cupped palm- a nervous tick he learned from Tony. His voice is about three times quieter and Tony doesn't understand why. "And I told him that you knew my last name."

"Also good," Tony says, spreading his hands in triumph that he got to the end of the story, even though he didn't understand why someone saying some crap about him would make Peter mad to the point of straight up body slamming someone....they still made it to the end. Or so he thought.

"I told him my last name was Stark," Peter mumbled to finish it all off, glancing down.

Well there was the kicker.

Tony froze and looked at him in shock, a smile fighting to grow on his face as disbelief held it back. There's silence before he realizes he needs to respond somehow and forces his voice to work, "Well that's- that's- a good name," he stuttered awkwardly, clearing his throat, unsure what to say next. He tries for a joke which makes the kid smirk, "Pepper's gonna be pissed you got it before her. But...I like the sound of it, kid."

"You do?" Peter asked quietly, daring to raise his eyes.

"If you do," Tony assured him with a grin, reaching and ruffling his hair out of habit.

Peter smiled and nodded, "Y-yeah. I think I do."

Tony grins before his gaze looks over Peter's shoulder and through the blinds to the crowd of kids passing the windows. His glasses hone in and pick out a boy with audio matching the key words he had just thought of. The name Eugene Thompson pops up on his screen with an instagram of its_the_flash.

"I found Flash," Tony growls, gaze over the teen's shoulder and out the window to the hall. He's about ten times worse looking than Peter and he's holding an ice pack to his swollen face.

But in that moment, he doesn't care how bad he looks. He sees Peter's split lip and that's honestly all he cares about. He rises out of his chair and shoves it aside. Tony straightens his glasses and announces, "I'll be right back, just sit tight-"

He doesn't make it to the door because a hand grasps his sleeve. Tony looks at who's grabbing his arm and Peter, who had shot up from his chair, has his fingers curled around his jacket. The boy shakes his head slowly, his gaze sincere. "It's not worth it," Peter whispers with a pleading look.

"He's not worth it." Tony nods, glaring at the boy through the window as he disappears down the hall with his buddies that looked a little beaten up as well. He can't help but feel deflated and he instinctively reaches and ruffles Peter's hair before leaving his hand on his head. He looks down and their gazes lock.

"You good?" Tony asks. Peter gives him a nod, lightly, as he leans into Tony's touch just a slight bit. "Okay," Tony agrees, hesitantly dropping his hand to cup the kid's cheek as he looks over the black eye and split lip. Peter reaches and slaps his hand away before giving him a look that clearly says, *diagnose me 'Bones', and I'll kill you.*

Tony sighs, repeating, "Okay." He starts for the door, before digging his keys out of his pocket. Tony tosses them behind him and Peter catches them in confusion. Tony looks over his shoulder to explain as he holds the door open for him, "You're driving home."

Ross sat very still, staring at the wall of his cell. He had been still for quite some time, even as the alarms were going off, even as he felt the ground rattle, even as the entire world had turned red, dust falling from the flickering lights. He heard the massive footsteps pounding down the hallway. Somehow he knew they were for him. His cell had a small door that allowed for a little space between the second, perfect for visitors. He still did not move when the first one was ripped off its hinges. But the yells had stopped. The shooting had stopped. The flashing red lights that draped his surroundings in a blanket of maroon and blaring alarms had not. He kept his breathing steady and eyes straight ahead, adjuting to the darkened room.

"General Ross." It came from behind him and he knew someone was standing at his door. He did not know the voice, but he somehow recognized it, which didn't make sense to him. Ross never liked when things didn't make sense.

"Who's asking?" he said calmly.

"Someone who was silenced for doing their job. You and I are very similar."

Ross pursed his lips and looked down with a smile, slowly spinning on the smooth bench, "I would like to know who I'm address-

The man in front of him was no man. It was a machine, with the soft red light bouncing off the shiny armor. It almost looked like an iron man suit except it was black and green, with the same glinting metal, sharp around the edges with a sort of feather pattern. The chest looked bulletproof- in fact the entire suit did, and the hands curled into claws that glinted in the red lights that were tinting the room. It was a horribly magnificent suit. A helmet with green eyes stared back at him. Without warning, strong, metallic, armored wings shot out of the sides of a massive harness attached to its back. They shattered through the concrete on either side, sending the walls crumbling down around him. Ross did not flinch, but his eyebrow raised. Even as the dust rose and clouded around the man who was silhouetted in the hallway glow, the green eyes still flashed through the red blinking lights.

Ross noticed that his cell door remained locked. He frowned and motioned forward, "You're not letting me out?"

"You'll help me anyway," the man shrugged.

"Who are you?" Ross demanded.

There was a pause. Then one of the armored hands lifted and clicked the side of the helmet. The suit retracted on itself and peeled back, the helmet falling away. A man stepped out of the massive suit, the harness still attached to his back. He walked with a slight limp, and wore a leather jacket. He was wearing gloves but from the burns on his face, Ross knew every bit of skin that was covered had those same scars. Even with an eye patch, Ross still recognized him from the many files on his desk with this man's name on it.

"Adrian Toomes," he muttered, crossing his arms and laughing. "Nice suit."

"Thank you," the man nods, looking behind him at the masterpiece that rivaled even Stark's tech. "It's new. I pulled some favors from some old friends."

"Old friends from the grave?" Ross asked, crossing his arms. "Last I heard, you were dead."

"You heard wrong," the man said with a crooked smile, walking up to his door and standing still.

"I take it Tony and Peter heard wrong as well," he raises an eyebrow. The man's face falls into a snarl and he nods slowly. Ross looks him over carefully, one of the Board of Directors top priority suspects, traveling under the radar, going to kill innocent people, thought dead. "You never fail to surprise me, Toomes." Ross got to his feet and smiled, "You went through all this trouble, put yourself smack in the middle of one of the most secure prisons, just to get a five minute conversation with me? I'm flattered."

"You should be," Adrian nodded firmly, not breaking his dead look on his face, his eye that showed more pain that Ross has ever seen. And yet...no pain at all. He was emotionless.

"And why should I help you?" Ross cocked his head, getting face to face with the man, separated only by the door between them that he knew he would not open.

"Because I'm going to kill Peter Parker. And in turn that will ruin Tony Stark," Adrian said. Ross' eyes flashed and the man smiled at his response, his burned face creasing. It was as if he already smelled and tasted victory. Ross did not speak, so Toomes respectfully continued. "Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what you failed to do? I'm asking you to help me do what you never could," he asked mockingly, his eyes widening with taunting innocence. Ross turned away and looked down, taking a few steps backward.

Toomes did not give up that easy. He stepped closer to the door, his tone quiet but firm; he knew what he was going to say would resonate. "Maybe you need to be dead to accomplish the task. Many have tried and failed, all weak."

"Insulting me is not doing you any favors," Ross snarled.

"And yet, I don't care," the man laughed. "You're a coward like the rest of them, a suck up to the men in power who don't give a crap about the people like me. You sit in your thrones and dictate without a thought, you have everything handed to you on a golden platter. And yet you still crave more, you slash anyone's throat who threatens you. But this time," he says quietly. "You failed. You messed up. I don't even need to offer you anything for you to help me and you know it."

"Is that so?" Ross asked, his voice tinged with hate and defeat.

"Yes," the man nods. "You and I are not so different. We are both willing to throw morals away, throw ourselves away to get revenge on the one person we wish we could strangle with our bare hands. So you're not helping me, Ross. You're helping yourself."

There was a second of silence.

And then Ross looked up, and turned toward the door.

Ten minutes later, Toomes had burst through the wall of the prison and was in the sky. A few casualties, more than he would have liked, but it was simply collateral damage. A call came in on his new and improved display in his helmet and he clicked it open, watching the police underneath him as they head to the prison, unaware of the villain who had caused the damage flying away above them.

Klaue

"Did you get what you needed?"

"Yes," Toomes smiled, rising higher into the clouds and plotting his course back to where he was staying with some of his connections in the illegal weapon deals.

"How's the new suit treating you? The knock out gas worked? And the tech installations?"

"Perfect," Toomes said through a grin. It was almost sad how easy it had been. "Guards were out no problem, one click had the cameras fried, system hacked- I had the entire prison down in less than two minutes and got out of there before the cops came solely because of the smoke. All distress calls were blocked, they didn't even know what hit him. The bomb blew up an entire wall- probably some casualties. You didn't tell me it was that powerful?"

"I wanted you to see for yourself. That's just the tip of the iceberg, my friend. You have time to learn the rest of tricks you have up your sleeve. And Ross complied?"

"Of course he did, just like I said he would," Toomes scoffed.

"Did he give you anything useful?"

Toomes considered this and then nodded, "I didn't know how strong the bond was between Stark and his now son- Peter Stark by the way, Ross confirmed it."

Klaue cursed, *"Peter's his son now? Legally?"*

"Yes, and they would die for each other. I'll just have to use that to my advantage. Maybe I'll kill Tony too," he said thoughtfully, undecided.

"Tony too?" Klaue repeated in confusion, *"I thought you were going for Tony in the first place?"*

Toomes scoffed, "Tony Stark was the one who tried to ruin my life and failed. I have a bone to pick with him, but Peter Parker...that boy was the one who stripped me of everything. Twice. So I'm going to make him pay."

"No offence Toomes," Klaue spoke slowly, his tone dangerously thin, *"but you said you were going after Tony. It's the reason why I agreed to this- along with the massive sum of money and connections I now have in the industry thanks to you. I am not in any way voiding our agreement I'm simply-"*

"Getting cold feet? Now's a bad time Klaue," Toomes said dangerously, his eye narrowing within the suit.

"No. I'm just saying that-" The man paused and then hissed, *"Adrian, I never signed on to kill a sixteen year old kid."*

"This sixteen year old kid is the next Tony Stark," Toomes countered furiously. "He's a sophomore and he's already taken down me, and hundreds of our friends. He is hurting our business, he has ruined me, and mark my words, he will ruin you if Tony doesn't. If you have a bone to pick with the kid, you go through Tony, if you have a bone to pick with Tony, you go through the kid. Whichever side you are on, the end result is the same."

"I have lived my life not picking sides and that alone has put me where I am today. The world has scarred you, Toomes. Are you sure this is how you want to retaliate?"

Toomes set his jaw and growled, "If you want to back out, just say so."

"A man once told me keep your friends rich and your enemies rich, and wait to find out which is which. This is as far as I'll go with you, I have done my part. Keep the suit, do what you want, Adrian, but this is my stop."

Adrian cursed under his breath but it didn't matter, he would continue as planned. "I am not your enemy Ulysses. You do not want me to be. Hide behind your foolish phrase, but I'm doing you a favor. I'll use my other resources to finish the job."

"The phrase came from Tony Stark. If you think he's foolish, you are wrong," Klaue warned him nervously. *"Don't underestimate him, Toomes. And if this boy is as much like Tony as you claim, it would be wise not to underestimate them either. Especially together."*

"Together they are weaker, together they will fall." The thought brought a smile to his face and he whispered, "I'm going to kill Peter Parker and ruin Tony Stark. Who wouldn't want a part of that?"

"Most people."

Toomes snickered, "Well I am not most people."

Chapter End Notes

Heyooooooooooooo now ive graduated to caps at least I THINK. my energy levels are weird.

Anyway *deep breath* my thoughts: heck yeah peter kicked the crap out of flash thats always fun ummmm oh before that iron dad gotta love it theyre amazing but oh GOD it still hurts because they just- pain. angst. love it.

and then that call in the lab was honestly one of my fav scenes to write dont ask why AND UMMMMMMM principals office *does a happy dance* Peter STARK ladies and gentlemennnnnnnn

hmmmmmm what else oh our fav person VIP great guy Ross! This is the last you see of him i promise, but NOT the last you see of Klaue or Toomes ofc. Like i said this was the last chapter before things go to crap at the end of the next one and then its just.....hell. I found another word to describe it! SO strap in because weve got like 3 chapters left after this one, I say three it could be four- who am I kidding, thats far far away im savoring every moment with this story because its honestly one of the best stories and the most fun ive had writing a fic. SOOOOO ok im boring you with my inner thoughts sorry if youre still reading, wow, thanks friend <3

UMMMMMM NEXT CHAPTER! Yeah, should be in.....5 or 6 days, and i say that with no idea how much school work imma get but hey well try our best were in this together. Have a wonderful day you awesome people, if life sucks im sorry i hope it

gets better, if school sucks.....i feel ya and im not even in school yet *laughter as a coping mechanism right here (omg like Tont- sorry...sorry) but hey you got thisssss I promise and we'll pull a highschool musical because were all in thissss- ill stop. <3 just your daily dose of inspiration XD

I need a lil more coffee if imma get through this day so seeyallll stay tuned, stay healthy, please tell me what you thought I love hearing from you guys and have an awesome day!!! :)

I love you 3000 <3

The Tide Is Rising

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyyoooo lovely readers <3 <3

Im pretty sure this is slightly late lol my b. first week of school was icky. and so were my philadelphia eagles :((((I needed a couple hours to get over my sadness today before I posted. But now i posted!!! XD Hellooooo

SO ik i said last chapter was like the last no tear chapter but u know what I dont think youll cry with this one either!!!

Im sorry it took so long to write, its kind of just an acceleration chapter, and everything is about to go to crap :))) (Holy crap I did not- this is 12k words. Well ENJOY XD that makes me laugh- last time i checked the word count it was mid 7k and i was like ive got spaceeeeeeeeeee. Well hey im sure yall wil love that haha)

\ANYWAY XD thank you so much for all your support, im super hyped to close in on the ending here, were def in the home stretch, and I really hope you all are doing well, staying safe and healthy, and drinking coffee!!!

Coffee is great imma go have some, it's 7 am somewhere

Wow I have like so much energy but its not transferring?? Probs because of the eagles game *huge sigh* hello darkness my old frienddddddd. Oh I also went to a soccer game and lost my voice from screaming at the ref who ejected my fav player. AND quick PSA: Virtual school is like 10 times worse than actual school :) Well theres an update on my life haha

I hope you all are doing well, I dont want to bore you, lets get into irondad because who doesnt love our fav father son duo driving!!

Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"R for reverse, Peter," Tony blinks before the kid can floor it. Peter switches it, mumbling that he didn't think he had enough space and Tony waves his hand, cutting him off. He turns to him and makes a face, "Good God, how old are you?"

"I'm almost seventeen, shut up," Peter says angrily as he checks his mirrors and pulls out of the parking space, checking over his shoulder.

"I know how old you are," Tony smiles with a shake of his head. As if he would ever forget the kid's age. "I was gonna ask why you don't have your license yet, but now it's clear."

Peter turns to glare at him as he stops at the light in front of his school and protests, "I haven't had time, okay! If you haven't noticed, I was a little busy!"

"What, since when?" Tony teased with a shocked expression. He breaks into a smile to show the kid he's joking and then sighs, hiding a smirk, "I'm just saying at this point you should just wait till you're 18 and get it automatically."

It was nice to have their humor back. He had thought of this before but he was forever grateful of the stitches that were being threaded through a massive wound that at one point he thought would never close.

"No I have to do this stupid behind the wheel thing for school," Peter grumbled in annoyance, putting on his turn signal as the light turns green.

Tony shrugged and shook his head, "Screw that. I'll teach you."

Peter snorted and shot him a look out of the corner of his eye, keeping his gaze on the road, "Yeah, I don't think that's how that works."

"I'm Tony Stark, I can make it work like that," Tony counters, straightening his jacket like he would a suit. He liked civilian clothes, he should wear them more often. He often wore jeans and sweatpants before they had their argument but during those three months he had lost touch with the clothes that kept him calm and comfortable. Tony put on the sunglasses and suit and played the part, leaving his Black Sabbath and ACDC shirts in the back of his closet. But now that Peter was back, he felt different, like he could go back to his normal, more comfortable life.

Suit or not, however, he was still Tony Stark. Peter scoffs but then looks over and sees he's serious, doing a slight double take. Tony wiggles his eyebrows and taps the steering wheel, noticing Peter's hands are lowly placed. He shakes his head and announces, "First lesson. 10 and 2, not whatever the heck you're doing- what are you doing? Pulling a lever?"

"Driver's Ed said 8 and 4-" Peter said with a frown.

Tony made a face, "If you want to crash, sure. Nah. 10 and 2. That's what it's always been. They're just worried about you punching yourself in the face with your arms higher."

"Isn't that a legit concern?" Peter asked slowly as he eased his foot down on the accelerator. You couldn't go that fast in New York city.

Tony blinks and turns to him, speaking dryly, "Yes it is. But you want to know who causes the accidents that have people ending up punching their own faces?"

"Who?" Peter questioned.

"The people who put their hands at 8 and 4. Come on. You can't steer down there," Tony instructed, and Peter raised his hands. "Good," Tony nods, checking the road. "Now change lanes."

Peter frowned, "You told me I need to turn left in a couple miles, so I should stay in this lane, so why?"

"Why? Because I said so," Tony explained with a sigh, giving him an annoyed look. "You gotta learn how to switch lanes."

"I know how to switch lanes," Peter grumbled, putting on his turn signal.

Tony nodded and motioned forward, "Ok then. Prove it." They stayed still in their lane for about another minute and Tony looked over once, blinking. Then he sighed, rubbing his forehead, "Any time now, Pete."

"Well no one is letting me in!" the teen protested angrily, looking behind him in frustration.

"New York traffic, kid. Gotta *shove* your way in," Tony explained.

Peter huffed and made his move, sliding over the minute he was given the opportunity. Once settled in the lane, he looked over at Tony with a grin. The man smiled. "Good job- brake, brake, BRAKE!" Peter stopped short at the line of cars waiting at the red light and gave Tony a guilty

smile. The man blinked at him and then rubbed the bridge of his nose. "This was a terrible idea."

Just minutes after he said that, a car moved in front to cut Peter off, the kid hitting the breaks with good reaction time, courtesy of his spider senses. Tony reached over and punched his fist down on the horn for him for a good five seconds.

"Don't honk, maybe they're on their way to the hospital or something," Peter chided, smacking his clenched hand away.

"Rule number 27, always honk. It's New York, kid. You either honk or get honked at, it's how you fit in. They're not going to the hospital, they're never going to the hospital, they cut you off because they had a crappy day at work, saw you were a bad driver, and took advantage of-

"I am not a bad driver," Peter gasped in defense. "And 27? What- what was rule 1? Or anything up until 26?"

Tony patted his shoulder sloppily and shrugged, settling into his seat, "That was your job to remember, not mine. You've got a lot to learn, kiddo." Tony rarely let anyone else drive. Maybe that was because of what happened overseas, when he was taken hostage. That had been the last time that he let anyone drive him anywhere, up until he met Peter. Then, he allowed Happy to drive while he rode in the back with the kid, so if something did happen, he would be there to protect him. But now, even with a kid who only had his permit at the wheel, Tony still felt safer than he had in a very long time.

He rubbed his hands together and announced, "Now, next lesson. Do you know where you are?"

"I've got the GPS," Peter points to the navigation screen in the middle of the car which is telling him where to go.

"You should still know where you are," Tony frowns.

"Okay, I didn't know we were in the 1960's. Would you like to pull out a map?" Peter scoffs. At Tony's gaze he sighs and glances out the window as he moves along in the steady traffic. Recognizing some of the passing buildings he nods, "Yeah, I'm turning right in a bit. I know where I am- this is where I drove Flash's car."

Tony frowns after a second of processing and asks, "You drove Flash's car?"

"I sort of stole it. As Spiderman," Peter explains, scratching his head. "An Audi A8. I kind of...wrecked it. I tipped it on it's side and swerved through traffic- it was not my proudest moment. Up until then I hadn't really driven..." if he was going to say another line he swallowed it and Tony moved on, desperate to distract the kid with whatever painful memory those unknown words held.

Besides, it wasn't hard; Tony physically choked, turning in his seat, "You wrecked an *Audi A8*? You're never touching my Audi."

"I was chasing Toomes! He was gonna steal your plane!" Peter protested angrily.

"Uh huh, well Toomes is dead so don't ever drive like that again," Tony rubs his forehead and takes a long exhausted sigh.

Peter smirks. When they made their way to upstate New York, it got easier, and then it was just the long winding driveway back to the garage at the compound. There had only been one more screaming match, and it calmed down as quickly as it had escalated; they had both made a Ferris Bueller reference at the exact same time of when the sister and mom had been driving home.

Finally, Peter pulled into the garage and picked a spot, parking, but barely making it between the lines.

"Im in!" he protested weakly with a smirk.

"Uh huh," Tony nodded with a fake smile before he pressed a hand to the bridge of his nose for probably the twentieth time and muttered, "Remind me to go to a parking lot with you for like 5 hours."

"Oh that will be fun," Peter snorted, pulling up the parking brake and reaching for the keys to turn off the car. Tony grabbed his arm, his gaze on the brake he had just pulled, eyes wide. He looked back up at Peter who said nervously, "They say to put on the parking brake."

Tony stays silent before he calmly asks, "Pete, are you on a hill?"

Peter frowns looks out the window at the concrete below before making a face, "I mean-"

Tony cuts him off in annoyance, gritting his teeth as he sets his hands on his knees and says, "Kid, could you sled down it?"

"Well there's no snow," Peter pointed out.

"Peter, I swear to God-" Tony warned, narrowing his eyes.

"No, no," Peter said quickly. "If there was snow, you could not sled down it."

"Exactly," Tony said as softly as he could. "Because it's *flat*. If you can't sled down it, don't put the parking break on. It's bad for the car."

"What rule is that again?" Peter joked, swerving away from the jab Tony aimed at him with his good arm. He laughed, slipping out of the car and tossing Tony the keys over the top. The man caught them and they headed for the elevator.

"Oh, did I tell ya. I'm getting this stupid thing off," Tony said, waving his cast triumphantly.

"Only like five hundred times?" Peter grinned.

Tony dismissed his comment with a flutter of his hand. "Well you're gonna hear it again, you'll just have to deal. Bruce said he could do it in 10 minutes, meaning you're also gonna have to survive without me once we get walk in," he snickered happily, knocking his knuckles against the white material that Peter knew he hated.

Peter had felt kind of bad ever since he got his own cast off, because Tony's arm was healing slower, which made working in the lab difficult and frustrating for him. He would just be happy when Tony had a smile on his face and wasn't getting pissed off with the screwdriver every couple of minutes. A mechanic with a broken arm was not fun to work with.

"Maybe I'll fix that 3D board you broke by shoving it into the wall," Peter suggested with a knowing smirk.

They had found out during their time in the lab that the same screen Tony had pushed aside during their argument had hit the wall and damaged the sensor. It was glitching with the output connection for the building, and could only be fixed manually. Since they didn't have any public announcements to send out for another week, Tony was fine with procrastinating. They had been meaning to get back to it, and at one point they were about to leave to fix it when Clint let out a

scream while versing Rhodey in an online game. Apparently the connection had cut out at the last second, which turned into a very funny instance, only providing more reason not to tinker with it and leave it as it was: broken.

The compound had the same technology that Stark tower did, meaning a majority of the city's internet went through their servers, and they were the source that controlled most of the satellites. The internet that traveled through was fine, it worked perfectly, but the output communications were what were buffering, meaning if someone wanted to widely transmit something, they would need to fix it right away. In a week, they had a press conference in which they had to utilize those massive range boosts and connection tools, but until then, having the internet go out and cut off all access at unpredictable times provided instances of comedic relief.

"Absolutely not, I would like to annoy everyone as much as I can," Tony sniffed, pushing open the door.

Peter made a face and shrugged, "Of course you do."

Tony grinned at him as they headed for the steps. They started up the flight of stairs and Tony turned towards him, making a face as he saw his eye and shirt again, reaching forward to gently touch Peter's chin, "You want to stop by med bay first-"

Peter rolls his eyes, "Nah. I've had worse from patrols, I'll be fine. And no you can't kill him. I know you were thinking about it but unfortunately he's a minor, and you'd go to jail. Not to mention murder is illegal."

"Who made that rule?" Tony sighs.

"Look, I'm fine, I promise," Peter insisted. "Although I will go change before we work in the lab later."

"Okay," Tony agrees with a smirk. He then puts out his fist, demonstrating different knuckle positions, "So when you clocked Flash-"

"I don't want to talk about it," Peter cut him off with a pointed look.

"Okay, well, news flash- ha! *Flash*, get it?" Tony grinned, glancing to his side as he met the boy's gaze. Peter frowned and Tony heeded his warning and moved on, correcting himself, "*Breaking news*: you've got an entire family upstairs who's gonna ask what the heck happened to your face. And saying falling down the steps isn't gonna cut it," Tony warned him.

Peter groaned as they reached the landing and walked towards the kitchen. "You're backing me up then. And you can't tell Steve I got detention or he's gonna shove those stupid videos he did for the admin in my face and I guarantee you Clint and Sam are gonna get into it-" Peter glances over and sees Tony's smirking. Peter grabs his arm, pointing at him and shaking his head, "No, nuh uh. Back me up. They'll make so much fun of me."

Tony put up his hands in surrender when Peter released his arm and laughed, "You got into a fight, be proud of it! Flash deserved it anyway."

"Back me up," Peter insisted again.

"Of course, of course," Tony assured him as they entered the kitchen.

"You're home early," Wanda calls lightly. Everyone looked up, their conversations winding down as they turn with smiles. Then their gazes fall on Peter's black eye, busted lip, and bloodied shirt

and the room fell into silence. The emotions ran high, in many different directions as predictions and their partnering reactions rippled across the faces of the team.

"What the-" Steve muttered, eyes wide as he sat straighter, a dangerous but suspicious flare in his gaze.

"Well half of us are supposed to leave for a conference, but I think we'll stick around," Wanda says slowly, sinking into her seat with a concerned look.

"Yeah," Peter mumbled, biting his lip and lowering his gaze, hoping his bangs could cover up the bruise under his eye.

"What happened?" Bucky asked slowly, his expression quiet and unrevealing.

Peter took a deep breath, unaware of Tony inching away behind him with a grin, "Well-"

"Flash, this bully at school, was a jerk so Peter flat out tackled him, threw his friend into a trash can and beat the living crap out of him but he didn't want me to tell you because he got detention and Steve, you're involved with that so have fun because now it's out, go to town, ask questions-" Peter spun to hit him but found Tony had already lunged halfway across the room, shouting, "Bruce! Cast! Now!"

Banner got up in shock as chaos erupted, Peter barely missing Tony's jacket as the man sprinted for the door. Bruce slipped out and Peter attempted to follow but Nat's voice rang out, "Kill him later. We need the story."

"So, you got detention," Steve grinned, cutting his smile at Peter's death glare. A series of groans came from the Avengers and Clint even went as far as to rip a page out of the newspaper he was reading and chuck it at his head. Steve backed down and muttered, "Sorry. Sorry."

Rhodey smirked, "Nat's right though, walk us through it."

"Flash pissed me off, so I hit him," Peter explained simply.

Sam snored once and pretended to wake up, looking around. "Well that's boring. Spice it up."

"Spice it up?" Peter asked in confusion.

"Hey, Buck, toss me that crumpled paper, I think that's the Sports section," Clint waved his hand, catching the ball of paper he had thrown a second earlier. He gestured his hand dramatically to Peter, "Put some flare in it Peter."

Natasha grinned at him, crossing her arms, "Kid, you got into a fight, you put the bully in his place. That's got to have felt good, right?"

Peter couldn't help but smile when he remembered Flash's expression and anger every time Peter landed a punch. "Y-yeah," he admitted slowly, starting to build confidence in his story.

"Tony said you threw him into a trash can," Clint offered, giving him a prompt to start out with. "Did the trash fall *on top of him*?" He looked around and grinned, "It's always funny when it falls on them."

"I- I don't know? I wasn't really watching the trash?" Peter stuttered, trying to remember what the rest of the cafeteria looked like while he was wrestling on the ground.

Steve put out his hand, "Please tell me you had like a nice line at least. Mine was 'I can do this all day'." He looked proud and waited for Peter to respond.

"I- I told him my last name," Peter said slowly.

Clint sighed and grabbed his coke, "Well that's boring."

"Stark," Peter finished nervously. He had been worried about how Tony would react, and also how the team would react. He was also nervous about how *he* would react. There was no thinking time behind that sentence...it just...came out. He hadn't prepared on saying that, in fact, even when Flash had cursed him the first time, the last name he thought of was actually Parker. But in the heat of the moment, when it came down to what was in his gut, Peter had snarled that sentence out with no hesitation. He had deemed that thinking enough; that this was his instinct, his gut feeling, and that that was all the proof he needed. But telling Pepper and the team was something he wanted to smooth over before he could officially accept the name.

Clint choked on his soda and doubled over coughing, "Woah! Hello!" Peter grinned as the rest of the Avengers broke into smiles and loud and exciting commentary. He hadn't expected anyone to oppose, but...it was still not something that happened everyday. And it had been an internal conflict of his for a while, so it was nice to finally lean towards one side.

"Outstanding, kid," Rhodey winked at him.

"And when you walked away did you just walk away or did you say something else to him?" Bucky raised an eyebrow.

Everyone stopped and leaned in and Peter straightened nervously, looking around at all the faces like he was about to deliver a make or break statement. "Uh- I, I don't know," he stuttered. "I kind of just stood up, wiped the blood off my lip, and walked away. Is that the wrong answer?" Judging from the fist pumps and high fives he got, Peter started smiling. Apparently it was the right answer.

"You even got the lip wipe, classic," Clint hooted loudly, chugging the rest of his coke and launching it across the room without looking. It landed perfectly in the trash can and Natasha did the same, getting a dirty look when hers landed perfectly as well.

"You're not special, Clint," she teased, shoving him in the shoulder.

"That was the right thing to do, kid," Steve nodded, giving Peter a proud smile.

Bucky snorted, kicking his feet up on the table and shoving a palm into Cap's back, "You wouldn't know, Steve. You constantly got beaten up and I was the one who had to defend you." Steve shot him a look and Sam snickered.

"Studies show that winning an argument is more impactful when you do not add recognition of your victory," Vision says with an impressed look, giving Peter an encouraging smile. Well if the facts were on his side, Peter definitely had done something right.

He looks around and nods, "Well thanks. This is...much better than how I thought this was going to go."

"I think we should watch one of Steve's videos though," Sam suggested. "Just so you know that in the future, you should be conscious of Flash's feelings and solve problems using your words. Is that all that happened or is there more?"

Peter snickered, hefting his backpack over his shoulder as everyone looked at him with pride. He bit his lip and shrugged, "I mean, I got sent to the principal's office, Mj told me nice punch and then I had to call T-"

"MJ was there!" Steve broke into a smile and Peter's face dropped immediately, realizing his mistake. *This* was what he was going to kill Tony for...getting him into this.

"Did she watch the fight?" Natasha smirked.

Peter nodded, admitting, "Yeah, she actually helped out take out one of the guys in a really impressively subtle way, like she's done it before...it kind of scared me."

"Good for her, she's a keeper," Wanda announced.

"She said 'nice punch'?" Sam repeated with a growing wide smile.

"Yes, *Sam*, she said 'nice punch'," Peter glared at him. "There's no...secret meaning to that, is there? Like...does that...mean something in girl language?"

"Girl language?" Natasha scoffed.

"Well did she say it like 'nice punch' or 'nice punch'?" Wanda asked.

Peter blinked, looking around at the rest of the Avengers who looked as clueless as he did. He muttered nervously, "Those sounded exactly the same-"

"You said the same thing Wanda," Clint scoffed.

Natasha snorted, "No, no, she most definitely did not."

"We'll talk later," Peter blurted out, pointing to the door where he very desperately wanted to go. "My head hurts. I've got...things. T-thanks, guys. I'm- I've got stuff in the lab, so when Tony gets back, can you-" he waved weakly.

"We gotcha covered," Wanda assured him, sliding him a full thermos of coffee since she was closest. Tony wouldn't let him have coffee because apparently he got 'hyper'. Peter thought it was utter crap, and the Avengers would never miss an opportunity to do something that Tony didn't like.

"We'll see you later Pete," Sam raised a hand in goodbye. Oh right, the conference. Sam, Bucky, Wanda, Bruce, and Vision were leaving in a couple minutes. Peter took the coffee gratefully and gave the group of Avengers a salute, ignoring their comments about the fight and how they envisioned it happening, acting like he was part of some intricate story or movie or something.

A couple minutes later, Peter got into the lab and set his backpack down, sighing at his bloodied shirt he held in his hand. He had got a change of clothes but didn't want to leave it in his hamper, but rather try and get some of the dried blood off before he washed it. He rubbed at it and then gave up, throwing it to the side, about to take a sip of the coffee when he remembered the punch he had taken to the face. Grabbing a tissue so he could clean up his bloody nose as best as he could, Peter pressed on it to make sure it wasn't broken and then downed about half the thermos.

"*Congratulations*," FRIDAY said, and there was a smirk in her tone.

Peter scoffed and looked up, smiling, "I didn't win an award."

"You faced a person who has been bullying you since middle school, Peter. That's worthy of an award if there was one."

Peter straightened in shock that FRIDAY had known about Flash's bullying since middle school. He had never told anyone that really...pretty much only Ned and MJ knew since they witnessed it. "You knew?" he asked.

"I am the most intelligent A.I. in the world, Peter. I have access to almost everything. I pieced it together a long time ago."

"But you didn't tell Tony?" Peter said in confusion, setting the coffee cup down on the counter.

"You wouldn't want me to. In fact, you didn't want to tell anybody. If I had, you wouldn't have been able to face Flash, or tell Tony yourself, which was something I could not have done for you."

Peter looked down, twisting the tissue between his fingers as he nodded, "You know what, FRIDAY? You're pretty smart. Thanks."

"If I wasn't, we would have a problem," FRIDAY responds.

Peter breaks into a smile as he nods, tossing the bloodied tissue into the trash, subconsciously licking his split lip as he nods. Peter tucks a pencil behind his hair and grabs a screwdriver, flipping it in his hand. FRIDAY is an A.I., but he swears she laughed very quietly. Even if she hadn't, she had become a person, and he could practically feel her eyes on him. He groans and asks, "Alright, what is it?"

One of the screens blinks and on it appears some footage from the security camera in the corner. It's from a couple days ago, and it shows Tony in the lab, Peter hunched at the table behind him. Tony picks up a pencil, calling over his shoulder as he slips it behind his ear. Then he grabs one of the screwdrivers on the desk and flips it in his hand as Peter turns around, saying something else that makes the kid laugh as they go back to their separate projects. Peter looks down at the tool in his hand and blushes, rubbing his neck.

"Okay. Okay. I got it, FRIDAY," he mumbles with a smile.

"It's a good name- Peter Stark. It's fitting."

Peter looks up and contemplates the meaning and weight behind the statement from the A.I. He looks down to hide his pride and says, "Thanks." He walks past the 3D screen and snickers, touching the side that sends the screen sparking to life before spluttering out.

The lab door suddenly opens and Tony walks in, cast free, flexing his hand. Peter grins and points to the broken screen, "It's pathetic." The door swings shut behind him and Peter rolls his eyes, reaching to turn on one of the lights as Tony makes his way down the steps. "By the way, I'm still mad at you-" Peter turns around and realizes Tony is still walking toward him with an odd expression on his face.

"What? If it was Clint screaming again, yeah, the service just-" Peter frowns, blinking as the man practically crashes into him, wrapping him in a hug. Shocked, Peter slowly hugs back, cutting himself off. Tony's hug is tight and meaningful, but Peter doesn't know...the meaning. There's not something wrong, he knows that much just from Tony's body language. Instead, there's something...right?

Peter pats Tony on the back comfortingly, cocking his head in question. Then, Tony pulls away after a second, ruffling his hair before gently shoving his head. Then he turns, nods in satisfaction,

and then grabs the screwdriver Peter set down. Once in his hand, he flipped it, walking over to the nearest station to grab one of the iPads and act like nothing had happened.

Peter scoffed at the sudden change in personality. "Bipolar much?"

"Funny," Tony calls back before he stops at the counter and points to the coffee thermos. "That's not mine."

"It's mine," Peter grins.

"Who?" Tony sighs.

"None of your business. It's *mine*," he restates happily.

Tony raises his eyebrows at him and grabs it, taking a big gulp and declaring, "Not anymore. I'm getting tired of this under-handing. They don't have to deal with your hyper-crazy-ness." Tony waves his hand dramatically and puts the thermos in its new home, which is by his computer. Peter frowns.

"Good subject change." The teen crossed his arms as he leans against the counter, not about to move past what had just happened yet two seconds ago. He finally gets tired of waiting and spreads his hands even though Tony isn't facing him, announcing, "Ok Mr. Hugs-a-lot, lay it out for me. What was that for? I'm supposed to be mad at you right now."

Tony looked over his shoulder and lifted his bad arm, wiggling his fingers and moving his shoulder in a full motion with a proud and relived smile, "I got my cast off."

"And that requires a bear hug?" Peter starts to grin.

"If you don't want it, I can reverse it in the form of a tackle," Tony suggests innocently.

Peter snorts, and takes a look at his watch while shaking his head at the man's attempts to avoid answering his obvious question. Peter bends down to reach into the mini fridge and grabs a water bottle and a pack of dried blueberries from the cabinet above it. He tosses both to Tony, one after the other and says simply, "Just wanted to know the occasion."

Tony's shoulders tense and he rubs a hand over his face, setting the food and water down as he sighs. Peter almost stops him then and there, because it seems like the reason is painful, but he stays silent because his curiosity gets the better of him. "I- my arm's been busted since...then," Tony trails off, scratching at his goatee.

Peter's jaw clenches. He remembers when Damian broke it, when he drove his knife into it- and with that awful memory, and the sound of pain that came from Tony's mouth- a sound that keeps him awake every night, came all the horrors of that place. Peter understood how his arm healing would be a form of closure from what had happened to him there. At least that's what he thought it was. He was far from the truth.

"And if it hadn't been broken," Tony said slowly, Peter knitting his eyebrows in confusion as to where this was going. "Then maybe I could have...protected you more. Or sheltered you more. Or carried you, or held you up on that tarmac for even a minute longer." Peter straightens at that. He remembered that day like it was a mere hour ago. He had fallen into the arms of the last person who should be capable of standing, and yet Tony had stood. He had stood for long enough that when he collapsed, Peter had gained enough strength to pull him into his chest and catch him. He had never thought that Tony would be critical of himself about that instance, but now he was furious with himself that he hadn't thought it because it was so...Tony.

The man avoids his eyes when he says, "I haven't been able to hug my kid because of that stupid thing." He laughed without any sign of humor, referencing the cast which had gone up to his shoulder while his tissue healed as well. Peter smiled at that sentence, realizing he had not seen this emotional moment coming a minute ago. As if hearing his thoughts, Tony's gaze snaps up. "If you turn this into a Meg Ryan movie, Pete, I swear to God, it was your fault for asking," he warns with a smirk.

"Didn't say anything." Peter puts his hands up in defense.

Tony narrows his eyes in suspicion, "Yeah, well you were going to."

Peter smirks and reaches back into the mini fridge, pulling out a sandwich. He threw it football style to Tony who sighed and Peter got one for himself, giving him a pointed look. Tony unwrapped it and rolled his eyes, taking a bite. "I'm still mad at you," Peter announced, forcing a frown on his face.

Tony sighed and pressed a button on his watch, looking to the back of the lab. Peter followed his gaze and watched as two of the doors that usually encased Iron Man suits open, revealing his Iron Spider suit and a black and red version of his Spiderman suit. They somehow gleamed in the room, and Peter nearly dropped his sandwich, his eyes going wide as he grinned and spluttered, "You're forgiven. Immediately."

Tripping over his own feet, he walked forward in awe. Finding his voice, he licked his lips and pointed, "C-can we- please-" he begged.

"No, I like staring at them better," Tony drawled, before winking. "Let's get to work."

About an hour later, Peter's adding some more features to his suit when Tony comes by and taps him on the shoulder. He yawns and shows him his watch, pointing to the door of the lab and explaining, "Meeting. Be right back?"

Peter nods, distracted, and he hears Tony walk away, stop, and then walk back. He's expecting he forgot something which is why Peter nearly jumps out of his skin when Tony is right next to him and suggests, "You want to come with?" Peter was about to curse out his spider senses when he realizes they hadn't gone off because Tony was not a threat. He had figured that out early on, that Tony was really the only person his senses didn't spike for.

Peter blinks and looks at him, asking, "You serious?"

"No, I took an extra ten steps to mess with you," Tony mutters in annoyance.

"That's not helpful, you'd run a marathon," Peter counters, not phased. There were many times when the man had gone out of his way to annoy him, and vice versa.

Tony makes a face of agreement before he shakes his head and restates, "I'm not kidding. I mean, you've got to get a feel for them. See how to talk to-" he stops. "Although you did a pretty good job in front of the board last time," he admits, and Peter straightens with pride. "But as heir of Stark Industries...I didn't know if you might want to...sit in? Because sooner or later they're gonna have to have meetings with *you*."

"Sooner or later?" Peter demands, turning towards him with narrowed eyes. "Are you dying soon? You have plans? I told you, I'm not going to your funeral."

Tony grins, "Don't worry, I'm *not* planning on it. But I do plan on getting lazy soon. So then I'll just toss it all over and watch the comedy unfold because I'll be," he takes a big relaxing sigh, "Retired." He smiles cockily as Peter's jaw drops.

After a second, the boy feels comfortable that he read his expression correctly and kid breaks into a smirk, knowing he's joking. "That's not funny," Peter laughs nervously before gulping and repeating himself with a more firm tone, "Seriously, Tony. That's not funny."

"I think it's hilarious," Tony shrugs, winking as he walks to the steps of the lab and asks over his shoulder, "You coming?"

Peter closes his tabs and nods, starting to put some of the tools back in their places. "So do they know I'm-" He swallows and waves his hand for Tony to fill in the blank because it was too intimidating for him to say it himself as a sophomore in high school.

"Heir of Stark Industries," Tony says slowly with a grin.

"Yeah," Peter says as he rubs his chin, his voice an octave higher.

Tony snickers and assures him, "You can say it, kid. It's four words."

"Shut up," Peter says dismissively. "Do they know?"

"Well I told them a couple years ago so I would hope they wrote it down then," Tony scratches his head in confusion and nods.

Peter had planned to toss the screwdriver to the next counter where it's brothers and sisters were placed but instead he chucks it in his surprise. It embeds itself in the wall because of his super strength, and Peter nearly falls forward, spinning to face him in shock. Tony leans on his toes so he can look at the point of impact, cocking his head as he makes a face at tool that's now lodged in the wall. "Nice shot," he admits, scratching his head and pointing to the handle of the screwdriver which is visible. "I mean, I don't know why you chucked at the wall, but hey, if you're gonna do it, go full tilt-"

"Years?" Peter splutters, cutting him off in a panic. "Why? Why on Earth-"

"You want sappy answer or professional answer?" Tony sighs, crossing his arms. He takes a second to look down and appreciate the fact that he can cross his arms now with a small happy expression. Then he adds, "Both are right by the way."

"Professional," Peter says suspiciously, grabbing the table for support as he attempt to breathe normally.

"You are a young, smart, and capable individual who I trust more than anyone to run my company once the time comes. There's no one I'd rather hand the reigns over to because you pretty much are me, so who else to take over than a literal carbon copy of Tony Stark. That's what I'm gonna tell the press when the time comes," he says for reference, waving Peter forward as he steps into the hall.

Peter scrambles over to yank the screwdriver out of the wall, tripping over his own feet. He calls out, "And sappy?"

There's a pause and he waits and then Tony's voice rings out and when it does he's not disappointed. "You were my kid long before I signed those adoption papers," the man calls back as he walks down the hall.

Peter straightens and smiles, taking a deep breath. Then he blushes and looks up, "FRIDAY, I swear-"

"I didn't say anything."

A couple minutes later, Tony and Peter enter the conference room and sit down in their chairs. Pushing the button on the center of the table which pulls up the hologram image, Tony checks his watch. "Woah, we're early."

"They're probably gonna have a heart attack," Peter admits as he spins around at the front of the table. Tony spins as well, kicking off in the chair to gain momentum.

That's when the video turns on and there's an audible sigh from whoever is watching them, and a voice says, *"When you're done spinning like two year olds, let us know."*

"We will thanks," Tony flashes a grin, doing one more full turn before he clasps his hands on the table, Peter doing the same. Tony motions over to him and says, "Pete's sitting in on this one."

"And is Pete prepared to follow our rules and guidelines?" the man asked, blinking at the younger teen.

"He's the only one who gets to call me that," Peter said instantly.

"Given that he's probably more mature than me, yes," Tony answers his question. Five minutes later, Tony is proving that point. He has his head in his hands and he drawls out, "The Avengers initiative was to make sure the world doesn't explode. Peter, has the world exploded yet?"

Peter, who is just as bored, and slumped in his chair, mumbles back, "No, I don't think so."

"Mission accomplished, can we please move on?" Tony yawns. He pointed at the board members, "You know, I expected you all to be a little nicer after I exposed all the stuff Ross was saying about you. What is it, I kill the snake in your garden yet you're still making me weed. I hate weeding. I hate everything about gardens actually."

"Although I appreciate your analogies-" one of the men says.

"At least someone does," Tony snorts, giving him a thumbs up. His feeling is not reciprocated.

"I would prefer we stay on topic and cover all of the talking points," the man finishes.

"Yes sweetheart and you have my full and upmost attention, but these meetings are like ninety minute lectures. In one ear, out the other, but I promise you I will still ace the test," Tony spreads his hands.

"You were one of *those* people?" Peter groans, hitting Tony in the arm. Although Peter was a genius, and liked to consider himself one, he still had to study for tests on materials he didn't know. He was never a good guesser.

"Kid, I got into MIT at 15-" Tony started with a cocky expression but the boy cut him off.

Peter tosses his head back with a sigh, "And graduated summa cum laude *we know*."

Tony spreads his hands guiltily and spins again, "See?"

"Can we please stay on the subject matter," the director insisted, rubbing the bridge of his nose. Peter's gaze flicks over to one of the men who is shifting in his chair, eyes on Tony. He sees Peter

looking at him and lowers his gaze, and the boy narrows his eyes in suspicion, Spider senses tingling. Something is wrong.

"Apparently not," Tony grins before his phone buzzes. He pulls it out and his face falls. Peter recognizes the expression immediately and his smile slowly fades, all other thoughts flying out the window as he turns his focus. Tony's face crumples. It's worry, it's fear, it's anger. His gaze flicks to Peter as he straightens in his seat, his hands curling into fists as he sets his phone down on the table.

"Tony, what?" Peter asks softly, reaching for the phone to see what made him so upset. "What's wrong?"

Before he can, Tony shoots out of his seat and positions his hand directly over the button that shuts off the hologram. His voice is firm and serious and he states, "Sorry gents, something's come up. I've got to do my job. We'll finish this later." He presses the end call and the video dissolves. No sarcastic remark, Peter realizes. Something is wrong.

The man is already grabbing the TV remote and clicking it on as Peter gets up out of his chair, demanding, "Tony, what's-" His gaze falls to the news channel that Tony switched the TV in the corner of the room to and Peter's jaw drops. The reporter's voice meets his ears, but he sees the live footage first.

"Multiple prisoners from the Raft who had escaped earlier this year, now attacking their original target- various parts of New York city."

"Those your guys?" Tony asks flatly and Peter nods. Shocker, Rhino, Scorpion- all loose in the streets of New York, buildings burning, cars being thrown left and right, muffled screams and shouts as helicopters circle. A building is writhing with sparks and the roads are lined with fire.

"Oh God," Peter says quietly, flinching as a car gets batted into the nearest building, the wall crumpling in on itself. Shots are fired but they don't do much. People run screaming, in panic and fear, and Peter has a sudden urge to just sprint and help. Tony's fists begin to curl and he looks over at the boy next to him. The man starts backing towards the door and he and Peter do a full turn and run for the lab, nearly crashing into Natasha, Clint, Rhodey, and Steve as turn a corner down the hallway.

"We were just about to come get you," Natasha said seriously. They were all dressed in their suits, ready to fight, expressions of concern on their faces.

"They've been in the shadows for so long, we knew it was only a matter of time before they came back out," Steve cursed.

"Can we recall the plane?" Tony asked, remembering that their lack of numbers was due to the conference that the rest of the Avengers were flying to.

Rhodey shook his head, "They're already there and in the conference. We could reach them, but pulling them out and getting them back- it's gonna be too late. That will just waste time."

"Well we're wasting time right now," Tony says, pushing past his friends and jogging for the lab. "Clint, Natasha, take Shocker. If I remember correctly, he disables suits with some energy blasts so Rhodey and I would be useless." They nod. Tony runs a hand through his hair as he makes his way down the steps of the lab and calls over his shoulder, "I'll take Rhino. Rhodey, you take Scorp. Steve-" Tony looks around and curses before he locks gazes with his friend.

Steve understands immediately and he nods, but Tony still attempts to justify out of respect, "I need someone to hold down the fort. Think about it, Rogers. This just happens to be on the day where half of our group is on a conference? I thought no one knew."

"No one did know, all information was classified, top priority," Natasha grumbled.

"Yeah, well top priority didn't work too well. This doesn't seem like a coincidence. I don't think anyone else escaped from the Raft, so the people in New York are all we need to deal with but I need eyes and ears and I need someone to figure out who else helped orchestrate this so we know what we're dealing with," he insisted.

Ever since the Avengers had all gotten back as a team, each mission, one person stayed behind. To help FRIDAY hold down the fort, to be there if anything happened, to be in contact with SHIELD and the government- the person behind the scenes that made everything happen and was the extra line of defense if something did happen. They ran communication, weapons, backup, press- anything that wasn't killing the people attacking Earth, that was their job. Tony hated it to be Steve, because he wanted his friend and teammate with him; they worked well together in battle, but there was no one better qualified at the moment. He also needed someone to protect- well that came later.

Steve nods in understanding, already backing for the opposite door to get to the comms room, "I know. I'll try and see what I can find out about the timing, reach out to the Board, and I'll double security. Link in comms should be up by the time you lift off."

"Thank you, Steve," Tony breaths, feeling more safe already. Okay, half his team is safe, the other half is fighting. Pepper is on a conference as well, with a security detail- he'd have that doubled once he was in the air. And he'd reach out to Steve and let him know that there would be another person staying back as well- if he could convince him. "Meet on the jet in three minutes," Tony says, finding his thoughts and everyone sprints out of the lab, banking the corners and running down the hallway. Every minute wasted someone else die and more of New York burned. They needed to leave. Now.

Peter had been watching Tony the entire time. In fact, he hadn't even taken his eyes off of him for a second. Tony walks to the 3D screen and preps a fully functional suit. Peter still watches his eyes fly across the screen. He finally takes a deep breath and announces, "You didn't say my name because you don't want me coming with you."

"Yeah, maybe." Yes, he was honest. Tony curses himself because now is not the time for the argument, or time for a sarcastic comment even though he wishes it was. He looks up and makes dangerous eye contact with the kid as his fingers fly knowingly across the controls. The look on Peter's face is indecisive, and for once, Tony realizes he doesn't know what the kid is thinking. He can't fully concentrate on him; he's pulling out the suit and programming it.

Tony attempts to quickly justify himself, "Pete, it's not because of Flash, or because you can't fight. It's because of the history they have with you. They know you. They've fought you before. They know your weaknesses, and they have extra beef with you- they will kill you if they are given the chance and I am not going to give them that chance. For all we know this could be a set up, they could be going for you, and you can't ask me to hand you over. They paid to get their time with you and failed, maybe this is a rematch, and I won't play their game. I won't."

Silence, but it passes quickly as one of the doors opens and the suit gleams to life, Tony tapping his wrist twice. His head his spinning- the last four minutes feeling like a single second. They had been thrust into freefall and he had forgotten what that felt like. But having Peter here just made it more stressful. He had a terrible feeling at the bottom of his stomach that all of this revolved around the

kid, and there was no way he was going to play into their hand.

"Okay."

The Iron Man suit flies forward and one of the chest pieces almost takes Tony to the floor since he's so off balance to Peter's response. He allows the arm to wrap around his shoulder and raises an eyebrow in shock, multitasking so he can keep his gaze solid on the boy that mattered most to him.

The boy explains, "I know you know we're stronger together. I know you want to protect me. I also know you're right," he admits and Tony can tell from a quick stolen gaze that Peter has a bad feeling about this as well. "So I'll let you take this one. Just this one, because I trust you. You're not going to walk out on me again, we're just gonna separate for a little bit. I want there to be a difference."

Tony looks at him in shock but then realizes he doesn't have time to think this over or appreciate Peter's sentiment and mature decision. There are so many thoughts running through his brain and he wants to express all of them but knows he can't. God- he can't even remember if he had said jet in two or three minutes. He nods quickly and mumbles, "O-ok, kid. Thanks?" He hopes Peter understands what's lying behind his messy words and stuttering.

"You stop them, understand?" Peter insists darkly, shaking his head as he adjusts the levels for Tony's blaster on the screen. His expression is serious and firm as he snarls, "I failed once. Don't fail again. Send them away for good this time."

"Yeah, Pete," Tony assures him. The teen unlocked the blaster from the station where they had been upgrading it. It flew into Tony's waiting palm, closing over his hand. The suit was complete and Tony gave him a look, the helmet still up and not covering his face. Peter nodded as an attempt to comfort him, "I'll help Steve with what I can from here. Go."

"Be safe," Tony insisted, eyeing him one last time before he ruffled his hair and cupped his cheek with a quick gaze of affection. Peter gives him a nod.

The teen followed him up the steps of the lab and walked with him quickly as Tony's system check ran through, his boosters starting to heat up. Peter rambled off, "Rhino can't bank hard corners. Use electrical lines for shocker, you can easily overload his suit. Tell Clint to hit the chink of armor in the center, that's his weakness. Rhodey needs to cut off or trap Scorp's tail, it's his strongest point. His eyes are vulnerable, the glass isn't bulletproof, so hits to the face can disorient."

"That it?" Tony asks, setting up his display with various features to track the movements of the villains and to ready the jet with extra fire power.

Peter nods and quickly says, "That's it. Don't get dead."

"Not planning on it," Tony winks, locking gazes with him one more time. This is where their relationship came in handy. There wasn't time to say what they wanted to, besides, Tony didn't even know what to say. Neither did Peter. So a look did the trick. And that was it. The helmet shuts over his face and he blasts off down the hallway, still wondering why the heck Peter was okay with this.

The boy watches him turn a corner and shoot down the hall as he heads to the jet. He takes his first deep breath and runs a hand through his hair, feeling his heart pounding in his chest. Well that had happened quickly. A minute ago they were spinning in chairs at a meeting, and now they were separated, left apart by the evil that was destroying the city miles away.

Peter stands there for a second with a lump in his throat, itching to follow him to the jet. He let him go because he knew Tony would be worried about him the entire time if he had gone with him. Tony would put Peter first, and that's not what New York needed right now. Peter knew he would put Tony first as well. If one of those people somehow got a hold of Tony, Peter would let the city burn if it meant they spared his life. That couldn't happen, Peter knew that, Tony knew that. This is what they needed to start accepting, the fact that they couldn't always be together. New York needed someone who would stop at nothing, and not let anything stop them. It needed one or the other, and Peter's odds were not looking so good. Tony was right, those were *his* enemies. Peter knew how they fought, but they knew how *he* fought. They knew his weaknesses, they knew what to say, they knew who to threaten.

On top of that, he remembered what Tony had said when he hugged him. He hadn't been there to protect him, he wished he had done more. Peter would not let any guilt fall onto that man's shoulders, at least not right away, so if staying put stopped that, then he would do it.

Praying he made the right choice, he starts down the opposite hallway to find Steve, determined to play his part.

Steve is punching a button on one of the control panels when Peter jogs in. He gives him a quick salute, "Hey kid, come to join the party?"

"Pretty sure the party is out there, but yeah," Peter sighs, crossing his arms. "You get the memo you're babysitting?"

Steve snorted, "Peter, you can take care of yourself, I'm not babysitting. You could have gone and kicked all of their butts halfway to Coney Island. I know why you stayed."

"No you don't," Peter shook his head with a slight smile.

Steve picked up the phone as he dialed a number and countered, "Yeah, I do. Tony. You were trying to protect him, and you realized that splitting up isn't always used as a negative term. Am I close?" He wiggles his eyebrows as the person on the other end answers and he speaks into it, ordering in some SHIELD backup, about five streets away from where all the destruction is taking place. "I know you better than you think, kid. As I should, because you're technically my nephew."

Peter smirks and then looks around, "Well anyway, I'm here, what can I do?"

Steve points to the nearest computer which has a folder next to it, "Call and get a conformation on Pepper, I know Tony's gonna probably double her security until this is over so let's save her the trouble. I've already evacuated the compound so we're home alone as of right now. And hey, screw it- get me on the phone with the conference coordinator, number's on the 7th paper in that manilla folder. I want out team back."

Peter nods and gets to work, shuffling through the papers and trying to deepen his voice as he makes the calls and requests. Steve rambles more off, and leaves him to do most of the tech work. They're tracking the movements of Shocker, who seems to be using the buildings generators to his advantage.

"Peter, you know this guy," Steve points to the massive screen they've been watching carefully. He drags his pen in a circle, creating a loop around their enemy, "If we cut off his electricity source what happens?"

"Well best guess is he wouldn't be able to shock," Peter says slowly, realizing what Steve was trying to do.

"I'm gonna hope that's not sarcasm," Cap says, pointing to the phone. "Get the police chief on the line and tell him to get in touch with local businesses. Have them shut off their generators and power. We're gonna create a dark zone around them."

Peter grins and gets to work. The police chief, who Peter knows by name whenever he's Spiderman, immediately takes his advice, keeping him on the line as he gets the word out. Peter watches on his screen as all of the electrical sources go out around the blinking dot which shows where the Shocker is. Except one.

"I can't get him to shut it off-"

"Let me handle it," Peter says quickly, having FRIDAY pull up the number for the store. He slams his hand down on the number and speaks, "Sir, this is Peter Parker, an employee for the agents of SHIELD and the Federal Government and I am ordering you to shut down every piece of equipment in your store as soon as possible."

The man has the audacity to ask how old he is and Peter finally snaps, "Look, sir, you shouldn't give a crap about how old I am. I've got Captain America next to me, telling me what to ask you for, and the President of the United States of America on speed dial so if you care about what's happening in New York right now, and plan to keep your job and business once this is all over, you'll shut it down, right now."

A second later he hangs up, exhaling as he raises both eyebrows, relieved and Steve nods in approval before grinning, "Parker?"

"Well if I told him my real last name, then he definitely wouldn't believe me," Peter snorts.

Cap nods and then asks, "You've got the President on speed dial? Employee for SHIELD and the federal government?"

"It's all about confidence," Peter grins with a wink.

Steve smirks, ruffling his hair as he walks by and sends a transmission to one of the news teams they have on their side. "That it is." He puts a hand to his ear and calls, "Tony says keep being smart."

"What's up with that, you get to talk to him, I don't?" Peter demands, sending out some of Tony's medical suits to assist the people injured on one of the streets that got hit pretty bad. "Tell him I'm using his suits."

Peter pulls up three different news screens, each one playing the footage from the three villains attacking. He used to think that sticking behind was a punishment, but he realizes it's almost harder than being on the streets and fighting to keep the people safe.

Steve slams the phone down a second later and curses, "SHIELD director won't budge on sending in help."

"Well then call in the National Guard," Peter splutters, spreading his hands. "They won't stop until their dead. They won't go back to the Raft."

"I don't have that authority," Steve hisses angrily, running a hand through his hair. "And neither does Tony."

"Are you on the phone with him?" Peter asks hurriedly.

Steve covers the speaker and hisses, "Yes."

"Stall. Give me 20 seconds," Peter says, grabbing the nearest computer and going into the file he and Tony started a little while ago. His eyes flick back and forth and he says, "Alright FRIDAY, help me out here. The dirt that Vision and Sam found on Ross? Open the set of sections that relate to the other members and highlight the SHIELD director." One of the documents pops up and Peter clicks in, scanning the information on the sheet. His eyes light up and he stutters, waving his hand behind him to get Cap's attention, "Steve t-tell him Red-" Peter squints, "Red West sales. Tell him we will release all of them to the public with a click."

"Red what?" Steve demands.

"Red West- it's a company he runs- they did some shady stuff- just do it!" Peter insists.

Steve relays the message and his eyes shoot open as he hangs up the phone, "He said he'd do it. What the heck-" he leans over and looks at the laptop Peter is on with a grin. "You didn't just do it for Ross, did you?"

"Tony said blackmail would come in handy," Peter says with a smirk, leaning back in his chair triumphantly. "He was right." Steve pats him on the shoulder and then they get a ping that SHEILD is sending their resources. "How are we doing?" he asks nervously.

"Our end? Not bad. Their end?" Steve looks at the footage and sees Tony swerving around the Rhino, diving out of his path at the last second. Peter's been watching every second of footage he can, and Steve has seen him flinch each time Tony gets hit. He's glad he's not in comms, and it's partially the reason he didn't allow Peter to have a head set. Connected fully with Tony, when he got slammed into a building or punched in the face he heard the sounds of pain. He hated them, but he knew they would shatter Peter.

He muttered encouragement whenever he could, telling Tony to focus and that Peter was fine whenever the man stopped to ask about him. Peter's checking up on the other members of the Avengers which are holding their own and slowly pushing their opponents back. Clint is firing arrow after arrow at the chink in the Shocker's armor, Natasha leading him into toppled electrical wires and using her zapping bracelets to try and override his suit. Rhodey's got the Scorpion's tail pinned down and his blasting him with a strong yellow beam. It looks like they're winning.

Then Steve's phone rings. He digs it out of his pocket and notices an unknown number. Frowning, he puts it to his ear, hurriedly answering. "Hello?"

"Steve- it's....it's Klaue."

Steve balls his fists, waving off Peter's concerned expression as he gets out of his seat and goes to the back of the room. Once out of earshot, at least he hopes, he growls, "You're off the hook, we said we wouldn't bother you anymore."

"I know that. But yet I am the one calling you." Although he hears the normal grumble of the man's voice, he can swear it cracks. His layered breathing comes over the phone and puts Steve on red alert. Klaue is rattled and conflicted, and he doesn't know why.

Steve frowns and asks slowly, "Yeah, so what the hell do you want?"

"Look I- there's something I need to tell you, but it can't be over the phone."

"Are you-" Steve blinks, nearly having a heart attack as he recognizes the foreign tone as compassion. "Are you trying to *help* us?" What a weapons dealer had to do with three rogue criminals from the Raft, Steve had no idea, but if he was involved and calling, this could be a set up. He wouldn't put it past their enemy. Even if he had helped them find Tony, it was only because he knew Steve would have no problem killing him. But that once again works in Klaue's favor...he's scared of Steve...so he wouldn't double cross him.

"More so help myself, but yes, you will benefit from it too. I was involved with the wrong people-"

"What else is new?" Steve mutters, pressing a hand to the bridge of his nose as he flicks his gaze to the screens playing. He didn't have time for this, but something in the man's voice and a gut feeling made him stay on the line.

"Listen to me Rogers, I wouldn't be calling if I didn't have something important. You have no reason to trust me, but I will tell you that my reputation and life is on the line for this. I sent you an address to that secure phone line we put into play. If you meet me, now, you might be able to save the people you care about."

"Save- what- are you threatening my team?" Steve demands furiously, his hand clenching around the phone.

"No! God- Rogers, I don't have much time," Klaue hisses dangerously, and Steve straightens with the sincerity in his tone. Hearing the man tell the truth was setting off every alarm bell in his entire body. *"Look, this call is probably being tracked and recorded so I can't tell you anything else but people are going to die if you don't hear me out."*

Steve winces as he looks at the TV and curses the fact that he's even considering this. He makes sure he pours all the venom he can into his voice as a last ditch attempt to defer whatever game this criminal was trying to play with him, "In case you aren't watching the news, people are already dying Klaue! Why do you suddenly have a change of heart?"

"Because I have a heart. I am not a killer and I will not get behind what this man is trying to do."

"What man? What? Trying to do- Klaue, are you involved in this? Klaue?" Steve demands. If this was bigger than they thought, this was just the beginning.

"Steve. You have to trust me. I would never get behind killing- son- phone- address- now-" Klaue's voice starts to crackle and the man hisses, *"Take my help, or leave it. But if you don't show up, I will never stick my neck out for you again. Address. Now."*

Then he hangs up. Steve brings the phone away from his ear in both shock and confusion. Peter was staring at him, undoubtedly listening to every word. Steve takes one look at him, and then switches his gaze to the news footage and curses loudly. Peter's shocked by that; Cap was never the one to shout any type of profanity.

Steve pushes a hand to his ear, "Tony, Nat, Clint, Rhodey, listen up. I just got a red flag from Klaue. I know. Says he wants to meet, he knows what's going on, and he has info that can help us. Believe me, I hate him just as much as you do- yeah I get that, but think about it. He's too scared to double cross us, he knows what ties we have and how we document. If he puts a foot out of line, the feds will shut him down immediately. He's- Tony, he's a businessman, you said it yourself. He helped get you out of there." Steve nodded, running a hand through his hair, "Yes, exactly. No, we got that covered they're headed your way. I don't know. He's scared, and I can promise you he meant every word he said to me. He wasn't lying. If you had heard him-"

Someone says something and Steve looks at Peter, gulping, "Yeah, the kid would be here alone."

Peter, who was smart enough to figure out what was going on, shook his head, "No. This is not about me. This is about figuring out what the heck is going on and stopping these people. I can hold down the fort. You go track this bastard down and find out what he knows."

"He's good with it," Steve said slowly, and Peter strains his ears to hear confirmation across all other lines. Steve nods and then pulls up another earpiece for Peter who slips it in. He grabs his shield from where it was resting against the wall and clicks it in place. Clapping Peter firmly on the shoulder he starts backing for the door, "For the record I don't like this but--"

"But we have to," Peter finishes his sentence, nodding him off. "Go. I've got it here."

"You promise?" Steve asks, shaking his head, about to forget it all, Peter can tell.

"Steve, no," Peter insists. "If it wasn't me, you would go. You said it yourself, I don't need protecting. I'll be fine. You need to check this out. Now go before I go and make you stay." Steve nods, still conflicted, before turning and sprinting out the door before he can change his mind. It shuts behind him and Peter takes a shaky breath, looking around the empty room that he now controls.

"Kid, you there?" Tony asks from comms.

Peter takes Steve's seat and yanks over the nearest computer, putting his hand to his ear, "Yeah. I'm the Captain of the Enterprise now."

"Do me a favor and tell Scotty to beam me up, Nat and I need a break," Clint groans and Peter looks at the footage, seeing him jump off a building and swing to the ground with an arrow, rolling behind a car before firing at the Shocker's chest, taking him to his knees. Natasha fires up her electrical bracelets and jams them into the man's chest, flipping him onto the ground.

"You're doing great. Chink in armor is left side, below the collarbone," Peter says helpfully. "Rhodey, you good?"

"He's tiring, and so am I, but I've got it. Give me 15 more minutes," Rhodey sighs, avoiding the tail and slamming a massive rock down on top of it, pinning the Scorpion again before firing a blast at his face. He dives in and pummels him into the ground and Peter grins. *"You're a good base ops, kid. You should stay behind every time."*

"Ha, ha, very funny," Peter grumbles. He's watching Tony now and sees him slide to protect a retreating family before getting rammed into by the Rhino, slammed into the wall. Tony groans through the coms as he blasts the metal man off of him, falling to his hands and knees. Peter's on his feet and he slams his hand against the table.

"Tony, one more of those and i'm coming out there," he warns. "Be *careful*."

The man chuckles slightly before coughing and he hits his blaster once because it's sparking, Peter already turning to send him another one from the lab. Tony knew he didn't even need to ask. He coughs out, "Noted. I'm fine."

"Yeah, you better be," Peter grumbles, every fiber in his body screaming that he wasn't out there protecting him or at least helping him.

"I gotta see where he gets his armor, it's doing numbers on my suit," Tony admits.

Ok imma go on a mini rant here but like the hug and the sudden escalation to the action were out of the blue and i did that on purpose because i wrote a longer version and was like no it needs to be JaRrInG so i hope it was XD

I love Peter, just another PSA. Hes amazing.

But yeah! Uhhhh coming up, protective Tony >:))) some- oh no i cant say that haha lit almost spoiled it for yall. Ummm action lots of that, and uh well I think yall know what else. *jaws theme begins to play*

Sooooo stay tuned, stay positive because you all are amazing and awesome never forget that, stay healthy, drink lots of coffee because its good for your health, and tell me what you thought! I love hearing from you guys <3 you have been so supportive and it means the WORLD!!!!

IGHT PEEPS, until next time <3 <3 good luck in school and life, im sorry if its rough rn i totally feel ya
and remember,
I love you 3000 :)

Everything...Goes To Crap

Chapter Notes

HelloooooOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO lovely readers!!! Ok either AO3 updated i think or my computer is weirding out but either way i am HERE FOR IT???? It looks sm cooler.

Also the people have most definitely spoken XD the chapter name was decided before i even started writing the chapter hahahah btw the comments on the last chapter you guys are seriously the best <3 I cannot thank you enough for your support and just the humor and enthusiasm and encouragement yall constantly take time to send. This story is closing in on 35k i NEVER thought would happen when i first started on this site and thats just insane so thank yall so so much :)))

OK so daily pep talk. School sucks, especially virtual can i get an amen? XD COFFEE is great, 2 thermoses a day keep the sleepies away, ummmm idk what sleep is....im trying to think of more interesting things that happened recently....

Oh yeah! Here is what happened. It was late. I needed inspiration. I looked up Peter and Tony edits. I WATCHED THIS ONE EDIT AND I- if you havent seen this tony and peter father son AU edit called 'all my life'you need to. Its by akapotatogirl and i- i cant explain how much i love it. Warning its a lil sad :(((but ahhhhhhhhhhh

ANYWAY XD I hope yall enjoy this chapter, I had a blast writing it it was so fun, uhhh be prepared cuz action is starting to kick in again and this is full protective tony because iron dad and yay. I dont??? Think??? there is crying material???? But hey what do i know sometimes i make stuff sad by accident so disclaimer: for the record i am not promising you will not cry. There. Now you cant sue me for emotional damages. If that was an actual thing people could do to writers.....id be- i dont even want to THINK about that.

Ok ok ok sorry long comment, i have a lot of just straight hyper energy so not like KJGJFGkhKJHTUFHGJSDFJGHFJDT energy but just HI im h y p e r. SO enjoy the chapter!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Klaue didn't know what he was doing here. Heck, he didn't even know why he was helping The Avengers in the first place. All he knew was that something deep down in the bottom of his stomach was churning and he couldn't ignore that feeling. He had tried to, but he couldn't stop thinking about what Toomes had said when he hung up the call, or staring at the phone that Cap had left him after their previous encounter. Why Toomes wanted to kill a 16 year old kid was beyond him. It seemed like the man had beef with Tony, and that by killing the kid, he would ruin him. Given that Klaue had mixed feelings on Stark, he had agreed to help, knowing he wasn't going to do the dirty work but watch from the sidelines.

Although he was not a fan of Tony, but he would never willingly kill someone's son, biological or not. The concerning thing was, however, is that when Toomes revealed his true intentions, Klaue kicked himself for not realizing sooner. There had always been more raw venom in the madman's voice when he talked about Peter. Klaue didn't ask why; he never asked questions. This was the one time he should have.

He had never been the kind of person to kill for no reason. If he had to eliminate someone, he did it

because it was necessary, and he had someone else do it for him if there was no alternate. He's always been a businessman first, not a killer. He cared about the money. He always just supplied the weapons, which was why he was backing out. His job was done, and now he wanted no part in this. Klaue had fulfilled his end of the deal, so now what he did was his own choice.

Toomes' was off his rocker. Sure, he was afraid of the man. Who wouldn't be? Besides physical appearance: the burned eye covered with a loose eyepatch that looked like it would fall off and reveal the gruesome cauterized scar, his charred skin, his singular stare that glazed over to prove that he wasn't really stable when you talk to him, the rattling sound whenever he took a breath, the slight limp-

He could go on and on about the things that were wrong with the man he had chosen to do business with. Toomes was a walking corpse and Klaue had given them the means to take other people to the grave with him, including a teenager. The gnawing in his stomach and the unsettling chill that stayed stuck in the middle of his spine would not let him sleep. He meant what he said to Steve Rogers. He had a heart. He would not let a 16 year old kid die because of what he had done.

So he made his way to the address he had sent, underneath an overpass in the cold New York air. He had seen the television, the prisoners from the Raft breaking out, and he couldn't help but think that Toomes' plan had already begun. He had simply began recruiting people to help him. Klaus dialed the number right away in hopes that he could still warn the Avengers and that his timidity and fear of reputation hadn't been his downfall.

He also had another concern. Toomes had been in this business for a long time, long enough to know that people cut corners and went back on words. Klaue had used a secure line and put up multiple firewalls on the call he made to Rogers; he knew he had to be careful. It was still possible he already said too much. The madman would not hesitate to cut his losses, and Klaue couldn't afford to take any chances.

So here he stood, underneath the overpass as the rain dripped down from the sides; it was drizzling, echoing beneath the concrete. A car passed every so often, rattling the top of the overpass as it did, the vibrations slowing to a stop after a minute. The wind blew, funneling underneath the stone, shadows cast on the cracked pavement. Self consciously, he checked over his shoulder, looking at the time. He ground his feet in the gravel and sand, his breath clouding in front of him, eyes shooting back and forth. The air was cold and he pulled his coat up to his neck, praying, for once in his life, that Steve Rogers would get here faster. For minutes he stood alone, shifting his feet and searching the empty stretch of road on either side of him. It was when he heard a slight sound of whirring at the top of the hill that led to the road that Klaue breathed a sigh of relief, walking forward out from under the overpass quickly, water dousing his feet from the puddles he stepped in.

He avoided the leak of polluted water in the center that dripped down from the ceiling, sprinkling into cracks made in the cement. Relief flooded through him as he hurried to meet Steve. But craning his neck to look up with a hopeful expression, he saw no jet. What he saw was an empty suit, black and green, metal glinting as it blocked what little sunlight shone through the blanket of clouds from at the top of the hill. The edges sharply flashed, the feathers closing together on the spread wings. The terrifying suit was missing the man and Klaue immediately scrambled backwards back into the shadow of the overpass.

"Hi Klaue."

He knew that voice. His face fell and Klaue considered something then and there, mind spinning. He looked in front of him at the ground that was a couple feet away, a few simple steps backward.

Klaue took a solid breath, composing himself before he lowered his head and forced a curl of his lip. He turned and saw Toomes standing in front of him, hands clasped behind his back, his one eye gleaming. The man's face was confident, he was dressed in combat gear, and he seemed more stable than the entire time Klaue worked with him, which was almost...worse. If this man knew what he was doing...

Klaue had gotten this far in his business because he knew who to supply, who would be good business and who would not. Who would fail, and who would succeed. He had never been wrong. And he wasn't wrong now. He had sold weapons to some dangerous people, but the man standing in front of him scared him the most. Klaue swallowed, controlling his fear, "Toomes. Obviously, I wasn't expecting you."

"So you're expecting someone else then," the man smirked and stepped forward casually, kicking rocks in the sand near the edge of the patch of growing grass. He wiggled his eyebrows. "What's up?" Adrian asked mockingly.

"If you should know, I'm about to conduct a business deal," Klaue says confidently, taking a step back. Toomes limps a step forward, his smile growing.

"A business deal," Toomes repeats, obviously seeing past Klaue's lies. He can tell by his body language. The man makes an extravagant show of looking around, ducking his head and turning to the side before he asks cheerily, "Where are the weapons?"

"Pardon?" Klaue scoffs, casually reaching into his pocket to call Steve. His hand closes around his phone and he clicks it on, typing in his password.

Toomes spreads his hands and kicks at more of the grass that was in his way for fun, swaying slightly, drawling, "You're a weapons dealer, Klaue. Where are the weapons? Where's the backup?"

"You shouldn't be here," Klaue warns, thumbing through his contacts without looking. He had taught himself how to call and text without looking when he first started in this business, and this was not the first time it had come in handy. "Bad for my image," he adds with a wink, keeping his voice level.

"Bad for your image?" Toomes laughed, rubbing his chin and making a face. He shakes his head and looks down, chuckling, "No, no. I'd say doing business with the Avengers is bad for your image, my friend."

"And where did you hear that?" Klaue scoffed, clicking into his security contacts, keeping his gaze straight ahead on his enemy who's eye bore into his soul. Even from here, Klaue could see the emptiness behind his unfocused look.

Toomes shoved his hands in his pockets and casually sauntered forward, shrugging, "I have my sources." His voice pitches higher and he admits with a small grin that has no humor beneath it, "I also don't like when people backstab me."

Klaue stopped walking; he was far enough and narrowed his eyes, puffing up his chest as he gasped out in shock, "Are you accusing me?"

"God, no," Toomes laughs, walking forward and clapping him on his shoulder, Klaue giving him a wary look. "We're buds. You helped me out, gave me a suit- a fabulous suit, by the way. I made a few adjustments to it, I will admit, i couldn't help myself. Got in touch with some old friends. Some of them," he winks, squeezing Klaue's shoulder as he points in the direction of the city with a

longing look, "are rioting around New York right now! Burning buildings down, it's all great fun, really. Sheep being led to slaughter."

"And what does this have to do with me?" Klaue asked with a raised eyebrow, still wary of the hand clamped on his shoulder as he slid down to S on contacts.

"Given that you're calling Steve Rogers right now, a lot," Toomes smiles, his hand shooting down and curling around Klaue's wrist before he can react. He grins as he pulls his hand out of his pocket by digging his thumb into a pressure point. Klaue's hand releases from his phone with a slight wince as Toomes rips it out of his pocket and releases him. The air is cold and tense, every breath burning on the inside of Klaue's lungs.

Currently at a stand off, they lock gazes, and Klaue's eyes flash. Toomes sighs, biting his cheek and pointing at him, still not removing the hand on his shoulder, "You know Klaue, I like you. You keep me on my feet."

"I keep everyone on their feet," Klaue sneers cockily, not backing down. "That's why I've gotten as far as I have."

Toomes grins and makes a face, "Yeah, well, I'm not talking about weapons dealing, black market stuff. You put up a fire wall, got a secure line-" he snickers and asks in shock, squeezing his shoulder like they were old friends, "Did you really think that would stop me? There is one thing I've learned over my years, and it's that someone will always be there to ruin your plan. Peter was there to stop me, and now you?" Toomes tisked, looking Klaue straight in the eye. He lowers his voice and whispers, "It's unfortunate."

"You really think you can intimidate me?" Klaue snarls, leaning forward on his toes to make up the one inch height difference. This is where his reputation came in clutch. This man would leave if he knew what was good for him. Klaue laces his voice with venom and hate as he hisses, "I have dealt with men worse than you. If you so much as scratch me, I will have the top five weapons dealers in the entire world hunt you down and ruin you at the snap of my fingers," he warns, shoving Toomes' hand off his shoulder. "Don't test me. Welcome to the major leagues, Adrian. You're a small fish in a big pond. You knock me down a peg, I knock you down harder."

"That's a good motto," Toomes admits with an annoyed sigh, crossing his foot over his other as he nods. Klaue meets his defiant gaze and the man grits his teeth, lip curling, "Mine is, when someone stabs you in the back, you stab them harder."

Klaue is about to ask what that means when suddenly he feels a massive explosion of pain in his back, tearing through to his stomach. Klaue chokes on a cry, his vision turning white. His eyes widen with shock and he looks down, his knees buckling beneath him as he sinks lower, the metal ripping through his chest. The tip of an armored wing is sticking out of his chest, dripping wet. He coughs up blood, raising his shocked gaze to look at Adrian who crouches down to his level.

"Wow, that doesn't look too good now does it?" Toomes asks, flicking the end of the wing that is attached to the suit hovering behind him. "Remote controlling, a little something I cooked up. I do want to thank you for this suit, the skeleton work was all yours, and the weapons will definitely come in handy." He admired this panel he lifted his sleeve to show and wiggled his eyebrows, oblivious to the man dying in front of him.

Sighing, he flicked the screen which glitched slightly. He pointed, "Some of the reprogramming at work here, actually. I can compact the armor together at the wing, that's what's going through your chest right now," he says informatively. "And I made the engines completely silent! I did *not* have this situation in mind though when I added that, I can promise you that much." He patted the man

on the cheek. "I thought you were more the...villain type. But I see you still have a heart. News flash, I don't."

Klaue choked on his own blood, hands shaking at his sides with barely enough strength to try and stem the bleeding. Toomes stared him down for a second and then sighed in boredom. Hit a button on his wrist and stood, pushing himself up with his knees. Klaue let out a cry of pain as the metal dug into his skin, the suit moving backward, the wing being ruthlessly yanked out from his chest. Blood splattered onto the ground as the wing spun and returned to rest behind Toomes.

Klaue crumples to the ground, choking on blood, body writhing in pain as the red liquid drips down his chin and falls into the sand he had backed up into. His hands land flat on the dirt, barely able to lift his head.

"There was never a middle, Klaue. You were either with me, or against me," Toomes muttered sadly, the suit forming around his back, curling around his arms and legs much like the Iron Man suit, the wings flapping once, sending waves of dust, rain, and dirt flying in a circle around it. Toomes cracked his neck and slipped on his helmet, the eyes glowing green. Klaue's throat filled with blood and curses, his gaze a stare of death

"It's nothing personal. It's just business," Toomes announced. "I should be thanking you. You were part of this plan. Once you called Steve you helped me out tremendously. I'm going to go have a chat with Peter Parker, who happens to be alone now thanks to you."

The pack on his back fired up and he turned around, the suit moving in sync with his body, armored wings shuddering like they were alive. He looks over his shoulder and snarls, "Be sure to say hi to Steve."

Then he blasted off underneath the overpass, banking upwards once he could reach open sky. The whirl of the suit silenced. Klaue lay face first on the ground, in a pool of his own hot blood as he struggled to breathe. His fingers twitching, the man groaned in pain as he let his cheek hit the ground, focusing all of his efforts into moving his pointer finger in the sand.

Peter spun in his chair, pushing a hand to his ear, "FRIDAY says Shocker's electricity levels are failing. It's a waiting game now guys, tire him out."

"Woah really? I've been trying to discuss physics with him this entire time," Clint shouts, diving through a window of a building as his previous spot was blown to bits by a massive bolt.

Peter smirked and checked in on Tony, who was effectively slowing down Rhino, running him in circles and slamming him into buildings. Peter ran an contusion check on the armor and spoke quickly, "Right chest plate- there's a break, hit him there."

"Thanks kid," Tony called as he did a loop and kicked in his boosters, propelling himself forward and driving his fist into the spot Peter directed him too. The Rhino flew backward, slamming into the rubble as part of his chest plate shattered, sinking into his skin. The man roared in pain.

"Oh, sorry. Did that hurt?"

"Rhodey, how are we doing?" Peter asked, honing in on survivors that needed rescue, alerting the team of Tony's medical suits he had sent out and notifying first responders.

"Good, real good. I don't think he likes me," the man calls back, blasting Scorpion's tail, sending him crashing into a car.

"Well if he did then you'd be doing something wrong," Peter nods in approval. He pulls up his next screen and says, "All civilians are behind the police lines, we've got people and your suits running ops on survivors on multiple streets so just keep them there and take them down."

"Nice work, Pete. Any word from Cap?" Tony asked.

Peter looked at the beacon that was flashing, still on route. "He's still online but he's not there yet."

"If Klaue is yanking our chain, I'm killing him myself," Nat announces and Peter hears her fire a couple rounds off from her com link.

"Steve seemed convinced," Peter assured her. "Whatever the dude wanted, he wasn't lying." Peter frowns as an error message comes up on the screen and flashes once, indicating router maintenance. Peter tries to cancel out of it but it stays persistent, the red glint shining on the entire room. He stands slowly and puts a hand to his ear, "Tony, did you have a router check planned today?"

"No, why?"

Peter clicks a few buttons but it still says the action cannot be overridden. He types some more and gets the same error. Peter curses, running a hand through his hair; this was not the ideal time for some system check. "Because it's shutting me out," he grumbles, seeing what else he can try to no avail. "Coms will be down in less than a minute unless I shut this thing off. Any ideas?"

Tony groans, *"You're gonna have to do it from the main panel in the lobby. Manually override it. Cancel the action, it's probably overloading because of how many people are feeding us information and how much you're putting out. I'm good, but I'm not that good. Technology has faults sometimes. See if FRIDAY can take over in the virtual aspect."*

Peter makes a few adjustments and nods, "She's got it. I'm gonna loose contact with you guys tho."

"We're good kid, do your thing," Rhodey assures him.

"Yeah, we'll have this wrapped up in no time, just get us back up and running," Nat adds

The comms cut out and Peter feels slightly hurt and confused at why Tony didn't say anything, but then his voice meets his ears. *"You're gonna lose contact with them, but not with me, kiddo."*

Peter grins as he gets out of his chair and starts for the door, "You put a back door in here, didn't you?"

"Even before I left the compound," Tony agrees, and Peter knows he's smiling despite not being able to see the footage anymore. Instead, he's jogging down the hallway and jumping to slide down the rail of the steps, landing firmly at the bottom. He pushes through the door and makes his way across the lobby, stopping by the main control room. He overrides the lock and slips inside, taking a deep breath as he sees all the wires and machines throughout the room.

"Okay, that's not intimidating at all," he says, rubbing a hand over his face. "Please tell me you're gonna walk me through this," he begs, nervously stepping forward.

"I've got you, kid, don't worry. Sixth one on the left, open the third panel and pull up that screen. When it asks for a password type in 081001."

Peter goes over to the sixth router and thumbs down to the right panel, pulling out the screen with one hand and typing in the password. Then he stops and smiles, "That's my birthday."

"It helps me remember it," Tony dismisses it but Peter still smirks knowingly. The man continues with his directions. *"Now when it pops up, you're gonna see 'Periodic Test- Router and System Check'. It will say issued but that line will be blank because it was just automatic. You're gonna hack past it like you would any other firewall, access the mainframe and then bypass your way through,"* Tony says firmly.

Peter nods and does what he says, eyes narrowed as his fingers fly, biting his cheek in concentration. Reaching to disconnect a wire he casually says, "Yeah, all good, except there was a name under issued. Other than that, everything was the same. I'm getting in right now, hold on."

"Wait, wait," the man stops him. *"There shouldn't be a name for issued. Who ordered it?"* Tony asked in confusion.

Peter squinted as he kept the wire steady with his one hand and read off what he saw in front of him, "Uh, it says, Rick Mayfield?" Peter frowns, "Hey, isn't that-"

"One of the members of the Board," Tony finishes in agreement. *"Why the hell would he authorize a systems check in the middle of this? He knows we need the routers up and running."*

"He was at the meeting right?"

"Yeah," Tony says. *"Weird dude, kinda quiet, sitting on the left."*

Peter blinks. He remembers flicking his gaze over to one of the men who is shifting in his chair, eyes on Tony. He sees Peter looking at him and lowers his eyes. Peter felt a chill as he narrows his eyes in suspicion, his spider senses tingling, alerting him that something was wrong. And that was seconds before Tony got the text for what was happening in New York. Coincidence? Maybe.

He's about to tell Tony what happened when the man curses, letting out a grunt of pain, distracted from talking to Peter and now by something else. *"Hey, give me a sec. That's Steve. I think I'm the only one he can reach."*

Peter nods, "I'll take care of this and let you know when I'm done. Be careful."

"Yep, give me a minute, I'm just gonna have a quick chat about a weapons dealer with Mr. USA."

Tony's voice cuts out but Peter can't manage a smile from the sarcastic comment. He narrows his eyes and focuses on his work, reconnecting the wires and overloading the system. Work helps him focus and not concentrate on the fact that something was terribly wrong.

"Work with me here Rhino," Tony snarled, twirling midair as he avoided a swipe, blasting the man- if there was one beneath the armor- backwards into an already shattered car with a beam from his arc reactor. Glass scattered across the street as another alarm went off and the Rhino roared in anger. Tony sighed and waved his hand dismissively, "Get over it, you big baby. You came here for a fight and that's what you get. Now one sec." He clicked into the incoming call and groaned, "Stark here."

"Hey, how we holding up? How's the kid doing?"

Tony made a face, blocking a jab from the Rhino who had attacked. He flipped up, kicking the villain in the face and landing on one knee. "I told you to give me a second!" he yelled. "So inconsiderate. I'm on the phone!"

He takes a step back and asks, "Us? Hanging in there. Peter's fixing a router thing- someone on the board just decided to be an idiot and schedule a check. Or scheduled it in advance. Either way, it's gonna take a lot of convincing for me to not go and blow the guy up when this is all over. But Peter's got it under control, I left him on hold. Right now he's bypassing the wiring and counteracting the wiring from the central pa-"

"So he's fine," Steve cuts him off, and Tony remembers this is the same man who told him that the main power source of SHIELD's biggest helicopter ran on electricity.

He sighs and nods, sidestepping the Rhino's charge like Peter had advised him to. "Yeah, he's fine. How are you with Klaus?"

"I'm pulling up in 30 seconds," Steve responded sharply, just as nervous and cautious as Tony was from the other end of the line.

"You tell my favorite weapons dealer I said hi, ok?" Tony says firmly, landing a solid hit to the Rhino's head, sending him staggering, crumpling to the ground, slow to get up. He immediately grinned, "Looks like Big Guy is getting a little tired. Time to finish this, I'm tired."

Tony narrows his eyes and lets his missiles fly, compartments in his back opening up as he drives his fist forward, slamming into the Rhino and digging him into the ground before slamming him against the exploded road. He did a loop and then put up his hands and blasted himself downward, landing directly on his enemy's back.

Steve stopped the car and put it in park, taking off his seatbelt. He grabbed his shield from the passenger seat and opened the door, looking around. Walking down the slight hill, he slid to the bottom, shield at the ready, eyes scanning, ears straining for any sound. The overpass was dark with shadows and the ground was wet from the rain, drops raining down in a steady trail from above where a car passed every so often, rattling the metal connector that was on the concrete. The air was wet and Steve's eyes narrowed as he rounded the corner. The first thing he saw was blood on the wall by where he had turned in. A splatter, like a dog shaking his coat when it just had a bath.

Steve's grip tightened on his shield and he took a deep breath, following the trail, his feet crunching against the gravel and rocks that were scattered along the pavement. And then he saw the source of the blood. The man flat on the ground on his back, eyes open, perfectly still, surrounded in an ocean of red. Steve's shield fell to his side in shock and he stared, bringing a shaky hand to his ear.

"Tony," he whispered softly.

"Little- busy- Cap," the man responded back in an annoyed tone.

Steve gulped and said Tony's name again, this time his last, *"Stark!"*

"WHAT?"

"Klaue. He's dead."

Tony had just landed his final punch, breaking off the helmet of the Rhino, revealing a bloodied mess of a man inside, gasping for air as Tony had him pinned against the wall, clasps on his arms

and legs, his chest panel melted down and sparking by Tony's laser that had cut right through.

But when Cap's voice came through Tony faltered and asked in disbelief, "What? Are you sure?"

"Tony, I'm- it's him." He heard the man walk forward, his layered breathing filling Tony's ears as he blinked in shock. "I don't know what did this. The stab wound is massive. It goes through his entire back and to the front, he's in a literal pool of blood. It's recent too. Someone must of known he was trying to help us."

Tony tried to concentrate on the matter at hand and shook his head, gasping, "Yeah. I hear you. Give me a second." He let the helmet recede so he could glare his enemy straight in the eyes as he pressed his forearm against his throat. "Your suit," he snarled dangerously. "Where did you get it?"

"Same place as everyone else got their upgrades," the man snickered, blood dripping down his chin as he broke into a red smile.

Tony pressed harder and his palm heated up, a blast forming as he leveled it at the man's head, "Where?"

"An old friend," the man's lip curled, and Tony hated how he said it; he answered because he thought it was funny, because he knew something Tony didn't, not because he was afraid of him. "We're all just doing him a favor."

"An old friend?" Tony repeated in confusion. "Why? To get back at Spiderman?" he demanded, his fury getting the better of him. His vision tinted and his lungs stung as he swore. If you wanted to piss Tony off, you went for his kid. He felt satisfaction from pressing the man harder into the crumbling wall as he snarled, "That's what you want, isn't it?"

The man choked, barely able to breathe from Tony's grip that had subconsciously gotten tighter, "That's- not- our job- that's his."

"His?" Tony scoffed and shook his head firmly, "There's none of you left. You're done. It's over."

The man snickered, then laughed, which turned into a coughing fit, his head lolling over Tony's armored grip who forced him harder into the wall. The laughing continued as Tony's glare grew harsher and harsher, his jaw clenching as he grit his teeth in utter fury. "There's no one left!" he repeated more fiercely, which only made the man laugh harder.

"Tony-" Cap's voice came urgently from the external speaker and Rhino heard it too, a smile growing in result of the panic in Steve's tone.

"Not now Rogers!" Tony shouted, shooting a blast in his anger that made contact with the man's leg once he caught sight of the twisted smile. The villain howled as the metal armoring his leg exploded and heated, but Tony didn't care, he didn't even register the pain he had just caused. "There is *no one* LEFT!" he shouted desperately, tightening his grip.

"TONY- TOOMES!"

If his heart had stopped then and there, he wouldn't have been surprised. Tony raised his gaze and opened his mouth. He couldn't breathe, he couldn't even swallow right. He just stared in disbelief and finally found his voice, denying it immediately, "N-no. He's dead." Tony licked his lips, shaking his head slowly as his voice came out weak, "He died with Damian, in the fire."

Even as he spoke he didn't believe himself, his shaking tone betrayed him. He never saw a body. He had been played. He had let someone get away. Steve was right, and there was nothing he

could do to make him wrong. "He's dead- Toomes is dead," he repeated in exasperation. "Why- why did you say that name, Rogers?" he demanded furiously.

"Because I'm looking at it scrawled the sand right now. Klaue died drawing it. I'm telling you right now, Tony, it says Toomes-"

Tony turned back to the man in front of him who at this point was barely able to keep his head up. But Tony didn't care, his eyes flashing as he refocused on his enemy. Rhino had answers. "Is he alive?" he snarled calmly, more angry and scared than he has ever been in possibly his entire life. His voice was even, which was worse than shaking. There was a threat of death in his gaze. A couple seconds of silence was too long of a wait- he blasted the man in the leg on purpose this time, screaming, "ANSWER ME!" Tony barely recognized his own voice, and if he had a mirror, he doubts he would even recognize himself. "Is. He. Alive."

"Yes," Rhino hissed out, blood lining his lips, his eyes glossing over with a crazed smile as he winced in pain.

Tony let the half conscious man drop as his energy and strength were rapidly drained. Things started spinning and he mumbled out a curse, tripping over the broken road as cops flooded forward with guns raised to apprehend Rhino.

Tony's next inhale burned as he throat closed up and he felt his ears ring and stomach flip. He stumbled back, muttering, "Oh God- oh-G-" And then it got a million times worse, but Tony's vision sharpened. His eyes widened and then narrowed as he practically wrestled his body into focus. Tony froze in horror as everything spiraled back on instinct, every fiber in his body screaming a word. There was one name on his lips and he had never said anything so firmly in his life. "Peter."

"Go, go, Tony, GO!" Steve shouted in his ear as Tony looked to the sky, helmet closing over his head.

He clicked into his boosters and they sputtered out, his suit barely able to start up. He shot a foot off the ground and nearly fell back down with a yell, stabilizing on whatever thrust he was given. "FRIDAY, give me something, now!" he demanded in a panic.

"Boss- there's not much- to give- maximum thrusters are only at 20 percent- destination time quadrupled or more and I- I can't connect with- compound-"

Her voice cut off and the message **SAVE POWER** flashed on his screen. Tony cursed and clicked into his stats, seeing with dismay that he was running on backup power, FRIDAY's systems low. Rhino's suit had done a number, and he had taken some serious hits, especially to his thrusters. He had called for a backup suit and none had come, which now made sense. FRIDAY had been shut out. And now here he was, with no juice, and he wouldn't be able to get back to Peter in time. He willed his suit to stick with him as he shut his helmet and eased himself up to normal speed, dipping in the sky with every sputter his booster gave.

"Steve, get back to the compound," Tony gulped, hanging up on his friend and switching links. His voice trembled and he felt true fear eating away inside of him as he demanded, "FRIDAY, give me every bit of power you can save to get in contact with Peter. Secure link, no breaks, now."

He locked onto the signal, eyes straining to watch when the button turned green. The minute it did he felt a lump in his throat and his stomach lurched, his voice cracking as he yelled in desperation, "Peter, God, kid, you answer me, right now!"

A half of a millisecond was too long as he flew across the city, heading for the compound, knowing he was farther away than he wanted to be. "PETER!"

Peter had the screwdriver he had found on the right side of the room between his teeth as he reached in to reconnect the wires, crouched on his haunches. He disconnected the panel and clipped in the first wire, craning his neck to look at the screen he had been monitoring to make sure he wasn't tripping any alarms or hidden wires. Once that was done he reached to take the screwdriver out of his mouth and wiped it on his jeans, making a face, before he reached in and started screwing in the bolt.

Suddenly he felt the link pop on again and he realized that Tony must be done talking with Cap. It hadn't synced yet, so Peter wet forward to try and unclip the last wire with the edge of the tool when suddenly he fell back in shock as Tony's screams hit his ears.

"Peter, God, kid, you answer me, right now!" Before he could even answer, an even louder yell blasted through the earpiece, so filled with pain and fear that Peter's eyes shot wide. It was his name, just his name that followed. *"PETER?"*

Hitting the ground straight on his tailbone, before jumping out out of instinct, Peter groaned as he tore his hand out from under the panel, ripping some skin as he scraped it along the top of the metal cart. He cursed and exclaimed in confusion, "WHAT?"

His anger faded when part of him realized that Tony could be in trouble, but his gut knew that tone, and it meant he was concerned about Peter, not the other way around.

"Peter, thank God. Are you okay?" Tony demands immediately, his voice cracking in relief.

Peter frowned and rubbed his ear, shrugging, "No, not really- you just screamed in my ear and caused feedback on top of that which is like sticking a person with hearing aids next to a fire alarm but yeah, I'll live-"

"Shut up, Pete, for two seconds and listen to me!" Peter straightened in shock at Tony's tone. *"You need to get out of there. Now."*

He looks around at his half finished work and scoffs, "But I'm not done bypassing the system-" his face falls as he thinks of the team he left undefended. "Oh no, did something happen? Is- is everyone okay?" he whispered harshly, his hand curling at his side as he tensed.

"Everyone is fine, just- Whatever you need to do, whatever you need to use, use it, do it, just get out of there, now. I'm heading to you."

Peter's eyebrows knit but he did what Tony asked without question, forgetting the open panel and screwdriver that lay on the ground. He gripped the handle of the doorknob once he crossed the cramped server room and turned it, heading into the main lobby, blinking in the sunlight from the wall of glass windows. "Tony, what's going on?"

"Too far, too far-" Tony murmured fiercely. *"I'm a ways out, are you listening to me? Get out of there now, I'm not screwing around Peter."*

"I-I know you're not," Peter said as he quickened his pace, about to break into a run for the hallway. "I'm going, I'm-"

It was as he was crossing the lobby that he saw a small speck in the lightened section of the carpet,

slim shadows of the windows creating shady lines, but the other sections remained light squares. Except one. It had a small dot in the upper corner, something small casting a shadow onto the floor below, blatant against the brightened ground, and it seemed to be enlarging.

"Peter, what? Talk to me kid, what's going on?"

Peter felt his hairs stand up on his arms and he slowly turned around and squinted, putting a hand over his eyes so he could get a better view. "What the hell?" he muttered slowly, taking a step back as the figure enlarged.

"Say something Pete!"

"Tony," Peter asked softly, even though the man wasn't in the room with him. "Who is that?" he whispered.

"Run. Peter, run, NOW!" Tony yelled in realization.

Peter's eyes widened as he finally caught glimpse of what was closing in on the compound, unnaturally fast. And once he did, Peter's entire world flipped on it's side like he was inside of a rolling car.

"Tony," he said quietly, not even loud enough for himself to hear him say it let alone who he was saying it to, but he knew the man on the other line did.

Everything stopped.

Everything he thought was true was suddenly hanging in balance.

Peter couldn't breathe.

He couldn't think.

Instead he staggered weakly, trying to stay on his feet as his hope, his strength- all of it, was drained from him. He shakes his head in desperation. It was useless to attempt to convince himself what he saw in front of him wasn't happening, because it was. He didn't know how. But it was. And it was looking at him. *He* was looking at him.

Peter took a horrified step back, and then another in panic, and another in fear, locking gazes with the green eyes that stared into his soul.

No.

His enemy shot forward, heading for the glass, not planning on stopping.

Please, no.

Peter had never wanted to see those green eyes again, but he had, in his nightmares. Now they were real, and everything he had convinced himself would never happen- Some nights Peter would wake up from minimal sleep in cold sweats, shaking with a panicked expression. The only thing that helped him feel secure was the fact that Toomes died. The fact that he would never have to stare into those green eyes again, that they would forever leave him alone except when he slept, and Peter had learned to live with that. Now those eyes were about to get very close.

God, no.

His chest tightened and he bit back a sob as the Vulture spirals forward, raising an arm to shoot

something big at the compound, Peter knows that, but he still- can't- *move*.

"Oh, God-" Peter chokes out, voicing his screaming thoughts that keep him from thinking straight. He barely even feels the fear because he's gone numb. He's in so much pain, he's feeling so much anger, so much fear, so much shock, that he feels nothing. Everything goes in slow motion.

Peter pries his feet up from the ground and sprints, folding his web shooter over his hand and pressing his fingers to his palm. The web makes contact with the wall and Peter yanks himself forward with all of his might, hearing the small crack as the weapon breaks through a glass panel and heads for the ground. Peter feels the vibration of the bomb hit the center of the lobby as he lunges for the corner. Successfully diving down the hallway and tumbling onto his back, he feels the impact of whatever was launched into the compound, just a slight thud, before the ground ripples underneath him.

Peter can feel the brunt of it coming and his eyes widen before they tightly shut and he lets out a yell, covering his head with his hands and curling into a ball. The blast takes out the entire lobby, the entire wall of windows shattering, glass raining down in a sound that mimics a roaring ocean. The front of the compound is blown to pieces and the corner that Peter dove around crumbles in on itself, throwing the boy tight in a ball on the ground backward as well. He keeps himself curled and squeezing his eyes shut as he tumbles down the hall, sliding to a stop at the end. The world around him dissolves into dust and Peter groans in pain into his chest. Smoke crawls towards him in thick clouds, the fractured remains of the hallway still settling when he opens his eyes, gasping for a solid breath.

Peter uncurls slowly, breathing hard, wincing in pain. He's already cut up and bruised from being tossed like a rag doll across the hallway. Wiping blood from his eye that trickled down from a cut on his head, Peter clamps his mouth shut so he doesn't make a noise and scrambles backward on his hands and feet, coughing silently from the smoke.

His ears slowly stop ringing and it's then that he hears Tony's screams that he knows haven't stopped. He's throbbing and shaking but he manages to push himself up with bleeding palms and stagger to the end of the hallway. He grasps blindly for the corner, eyes stinging, looping around it and pressing his back against the wall. Peter takes a shuddery gasp for air as he pulls his tattered shirt up over his nose in an attempt to filter out whatever smoke he could.

"Talk to me, kid! Are you hurt? Are you okay? Peter, answer me, RIGHT NOW!"

"T-ny, Tony! I can't- I'm-" he rasps softly, his voice breaking as he winces, touching a cut on his side. "I'm okay. He's in the lobby. He's in the lobby. Toomes is- Tony- he's alive- he's here-" Peter chokes, feeling his eyes sting as he jams his head into the wall in an attempt to ground himself, pursing his lips. "Tony, he's here, I don't know what to do- I don't know what to do-" he pleads in a state of panic.

"Go. Kid, go. I'm close, I swear, I promise you, but you need to leave-"

"PEDRO!"

Peter's knees nearly give out on him as he bites his lip hard to keep from crying out. The same feeling of when he opened the door to see who his homecoming date's dad was, the same feeling in the car, at the beach, in the room alone with Toomes- it all floods back. Every fear every horrible memory that he had safely tucked away because he knew the man was dead was now torn open and thrown around like confetti.

And he feels like crumpling to the ground. He thought he was done. He thought this was over. He

stays firmly pressed against the wall, flinching- Spiderman, the guy who stood up to criminals for a living, who laughed at guns pointed at his face- *flinched* at the sound of the man's voice. Peter feels the tears against his eyes and he whimpers, "Tony, it's Toomes- but he's dead. He's supposed to be dead- Tony, it's *Toomes*."

"I know kiddo, I know-" Peter can hear the hurt in his voice that turns into a plea. *"Peter, listen to me. Don't let him find you. I'm almost there."*

Peter knows he's not, and that he has to fend for himself for longer than he wants to, but he nods and clenches his teeth, pushing off against the wall to stand on his own. He steps over a massive chunk of ceiling and finds his footing, before he keeps his eyes ahead and begins to run down the hallway- well he wouldn't exactly call it running- but he's getting as far away as he can.

Toomes has had a smile on his face ever since he made eye contact with Peter through the windows. He thought he would have to find that little spider, but no, the boy was in the middle of the room, an expression of pure fear on his face. He had waited for that for a long time. He had waited for Peter Parker too many times to count. While in jail, then as he recovered. Once was enough. Twice was humiliating. He would not let this happen a third time. The boy had slipped through his merciful fingers before, now he would clench his fist.

Red clouded his vision as Toomes landed on one knee after crashing through the wall of windows, wing spread, breaking them all. The destruction from one blast alone took out the entire lobby. He stood in the middle of the the rubble, eyes gleaming through the dust and smoke that rose around him, fires already starting to spark and crackle. He whirled around, spinning towards the hallway he had seen Peter sprint to. He knew it must have been a harsh landing for the boy.

Toomes heart was pounding, his chest hot with fury. But there was also hope and relief. Peter was here. And he was scared. And that was all he needed.

"Don't make me play hide and go seek, Pete. It's taken me way too long to get to this point," Toomes called sweetly, walking over the rubble and looking down the hallway that was empty now. He grinned and started to walk down it slowly, opening his wings to their greatest span that took up the entire width. As he walks, the tips dig into the wall on either side, leaving a thin line in his wake. The plaster is scraped off with a sound that would make a normal person wince, like nails on a chalkboard.

"By the way," he announces loudly, kicking some rocks aside as he casually saunters forward. "I'm not dead."

He's reached the end of the hallway and Toomes narrows his eyes, spinning around and throwing a punch that sinks into the empty wall around the corner. Looking down he sees marks in the pushed aside rubble and a smear of blood on the wall. He cocks his head, looking down the hallway with a curled lip. "Petey? I figured you would be happy to see me? Where's the welcoming committee?"

He clicks into his heat scanner and gets a pulse in the room around the corner before it goes blank. Toomes frowns and fires up his boosters, landing with a slide at the end of the hall. Empty. He turns into the room, standing at the top of the stairs. The lights are on. It's a lab. The man frowns, looking around at the cluttered counters and dark screens. He slowly walks down the steps, his metal boots echoing in the empty room. He passes the computers, sneering at all the high tech equipment.

His gaze falls on a robot in the corner of the room, built with shiny black metal and a long arm.

There's a dunce cap on the top of it's head and the marking of **DUM-E** in white bold on the side. Tony Stark's toy. Toomes snarls and raises his arm, a blast heating up to fire when suddenly there's a noise from the back room.

Toomes turns and smiles, calling, "Pete? Is that you?" He walks slowly across the lab floor, metal scraping the ground as he blasts through the door to where he heard the sound. It flies off it's hinges, flipping across the room, hitting the ground with a resonating thud. He whistles once he steps through the doorway, seeing 3 Iron Man suits and would you look at that- prototypes for Spiderman suits he had never seen before- one black and red, and one that looked similar to Tony's armor, red and gold. They are on their stands, arms splayed out and his stomach flips in disgust. He searches the room but sees no scared teen huddled in any of the corners. No Peter on the ceiling. There's got to be some secret door, he realizes; Tony was always prepared like that.

The suits were on rotation stands, so he figured it was possible that there would be one behind it. Having no need for the Iron Man suit, he blasted it into pieces, the metal exploding when hit. The helmet fall with a loud and resonating clang, staying in one piece as he landed solid on the floor, facing up. Debating on crushing it, he turned to the more pressing issue: the hole he had created in the wall, this time into a darkened lab. There was no secret door, but there was another room. He turned to the next suit, the shiny Spiderman one, with glinting metal as if there was sun in his room, the eyes and center dark, arms splayed and he stares at it with distaste.

Toomes sneers and shaking his head, raising an arm and casually firing. As he did, the eyes immediately brightened and narrowed, Peter flipping up and letting the blast pass underneath him as he landed behind an unsuspecting Toomes, kicking him in the back. He crashes forward through the wall with a yell of surprise, landing flat on his stomach on the floor of the lab, immediately rolling over. His boost fire up and his wings bring him to his feet, his green eyes landing on the Spider suit who had a teen inside of it, crouched in an attack position through the hole in the wall, breathing hard, eyes and spider emblem lit up. Legs come out from all sides, gold and gleaming. Peter would look intimidating to anyone else but the man in front of him, who sees past the suit.

"Smart, Pedro," he admits with a nod. "Very smart. I upgraded too," He shakes the small pieces of wall out of the small chinks in his suit, his wings flapping once to show their power. Papers rustle and Toomes snarls, locking eyes with the boy who he knows, beneath that mask, is terrified. The teenager is breathing hard, and he can see his raised hand shaking very slightly, the kid's knees trembling in his crouch.

Adrian takes a step forward and spreads his hands, "You're not as talkative. That could be the shock. Speaking of that, surprise kiddo. Not dead." Then he lunges forward, breaking through the wall. He closes his hands over empty air as the kid rolls under him, standing, but Toomes' new suit allows him to have better reaction time. He spins faster than Peter is expecting and drives his foot forward, grinning as he feels it connect. The boy can't even make a full turn and he cries out as his feet lift off the ground. He tumbles to the floor, sliding and looking up before immediately scrambling back. Toomes slamming his fist down right where the kid had been a second ago, already breaking one of the spider legs.

Peter shoots a web and yanks himself forward in anger, landing a kick into Toomes' chest and the man grunts in pain, staggering. He chuckles through the minimal pain that caused him, "No sarcastic commentary? This is a first."

"You're dead," Peter finally makes out weakly in the form of a small cry, stumbling backward to create more space between them, his voice utterly broken and confused. It's exactly how Toomes wants it to be and he can't help but smile.

"No," he corrects slowly, flexing his hands. "Nope, I'm not." Peter shakes his head and stays quiet. Eventually Toomes nods and says quietly, "Ohhh, I get it. You're not talking to me because you want to believe it's not true. If you don't talk to me, it's not real," he snickers, seeing the boy falter, and from where he is across the room he can hear the small strangled sound that comes from Peter's mouth. Toomes' eyes flash beneath the green lenses and he hisses, "Is this real enough for you Peter?"

He fires a blast and Peter lunges away before he slides across the floor, desperately trying to quicken his pace. He shoots a web above him, slamming a light down atop of Toomes who buckles, sparks flying down as glass shatters on top of him, his head cracking forward, neck straining. He falls, but that doesn't stop him from throwing a punch. Nothing stops him now. Peter ducks it with effort, still trying to breathe, and Toomes takes his disarray as an opportunity to curl his metal encased hand into the boy's angle, the sharp ends of his fingers digging into his skin.

The teen lets out a cry of pain, and an even louder one as his feet are yanked out from under them. His head slams into the floor and the kid groans, kicking Adrian's hand away, getting to his feet with the help of the scrambling legs. Despite the support, he still has a slight limp. The world around them is a mess of flickering lights, sparks, dust, and destruction. Toomes blasts the broken light off of himself in anger and blocks Peter's punch, driving his fist forward. Peter maneuvers to the side, using his wing as a step as he launches himself off of Toomes' shoulder and flips onto a table, swinging a computer into him.

Toomes bats it away and it crashes into the wall, shattering into pieces which add to the clutter on the floor. He cocks his head, "Either you're rusty, Peter...or I scare you that much?"

"Shut up," Peter swears angrily. Toomes explodes the counter he's standing on but Peter's already throwing himself forward, shooting two webs on either side and driving his feet into the man's chest. It's blocked mostly by the armor but still sends him crashing backward. He manages to get a hand on the boy's arm, taking him down with him at an awkward angle as he flies backward. Peter lets out a strangled yell as they tumble and Toomes comes out on top, pinning him with a solid wing before punching him into the concrete floor.

Peter coughs up blood beneath the mask, letting out a groan as the force causes the floor underneath him to crack. He narrows his eyes and spins on the ground, kicking his legs up and trapping him in a headlock. The spider legs push and Peter twists, flipping them both while voiding the swipes of the wings that attempt to fling him off, most being blocked by his extra gold limbs. The wing suit breaks two more of the legs, Peter being jerked backward when they were brutally bent backward. They dissolved back into the suit before he could flick them to the side.

The boy rolls away when given the chance, before he gets on his hands and knees. Toomes shoots forward, assuming the boy will stand, but instead, Peter flattens himself on the ground on his back, Toomes passing straight over him. He does a loop and sees the kid shooting a web at the wall to help himself stand. He stumbles to his feet, crashing into the nearest counter for support, crying out as his ribs made contact when the one side of him is lopsided due to the broken iron legs. The teen spins around, lenses widening as he makes eye contact with his enemy.

"Why are you here Toomes-" Peter gasps out.

"You thought I was dead. Which I was, almost," Adrian snarls, shooting a massive blast that Peter ducks under, taking a running slide across the smooth floor and vaulting over a counter that explodes behind him. He tucks and rolls, standing to fire a web at Toomes' wing, yanking it downward. The man was not expecting the strength and Toomes falls on his side, hard, and then gets slammed backward into the wall by the foot that hits him square in the chest, Peter flipping

into a crouch and extending his leg into a gymnast position.

"I should have killed you," Peter swears angrily, furious with himself. But there's a break in his voice that the teen can't seem to get rid of. It's what stopping him from delivering hits like that more often. Peter's on a rug that has been pulled out from under his feet far too many times, but this time, this was the breaking point. This is where he lost his footing, which made him weak. With nowhere to stand, he falters.

"You're right. That's twice now, for both of us. So, what do you say, Pete, you in for the tie breaker?" Adrian grins, his green orbs brightening as his wing comes up to block Peter's web, the other slicing through it instantly.

The boy makes a sound of anguish as he twists and jumps over a swipe made to his chest, hanging from the ceiling before flipping down when Toomes raked his wing through where he had been, sending bits of the ceiling falling down.

"It's Peter you son of a-" He doesn't finish because Toomes gets the next hit in, landing the flat of his wing against Peter's chest who gasps, his wind knocked out of them as he wraps his hands around the sharp metal to avoid getting tossed across the room. He hits his chin on the top of the wing, now holding it on for support as he deals with the whiplash and pain in his jaw, crying out as the other wing scrapes down his back, taking off another leg and some of the armor in the process.

Toomes shakes him off and the kid staggers, trying to breath as he curls his arm over his ribs in pain. Peter shoots an unsuspecting web at his knee and one of the remaining legs spirals forward and adds an extra jab. It's simple but effective, but Peter doesn't take advantage of it. It's only to give him a second to catch his breath; he's unable to go for a wide open punch because of the hit he had just took. Toomes falls to one knee with a grunt as Peter tries to take in air, coughing through his rapid breathing.

"Once again," Adrian groans, relishing the sounds of fear and exhaustion. With a smile, he meets the kid's lenses, knowing behind them there are terrified eyes that widen as Toomes gets to his feet. Peter puts up his arms, blocking his next strike with effort, Adrian giving him no time to react before he's landing another blow, slamming his fist in arc. Peter sidesteps but he's wobbly and he throws a punch, Toomes throwing one back as their fists connect.

Peter lets out a cry and shoves himself backward, flexing and cradling his hand as he looks up, shoulders tense, chest rising and falling fast. Adrian cracks his neck and knits his eyebrows, staring at the boy in front of him.

"I really admire your grit," he finishes, a recall to back when they had first met, when he thought he had killed the teenager for good. "Always have, always will. But I'm better than you now, I'm stronger than you now, and I won't let you win again."

His wing straightens and bats Peter into the wall, the kid flying back and smacking into it with a scream of pain, falling onto the counter. One of the legs breaks off from the force of the action. He slides off with a groan and attempts to land on his feet, leaving his chest exposed. Toomes surges forward, slamming into him with his metal iron feathers that are wrapped around his body. The teen hits the wall for the second time, this time face first, his forehead smacking against the wall with a nauseating sound. Half conscious, Peter lands hard on his side, limbs shaking with effort, head dipping. He coughs wetly and gurgles out a sound of pain, rolling off the counter and falling to the ground, struggling to push himself up on his elbows, every exhale entwined with a cry of pain.

Toomes brings his foot up and crushes it down right where Peter had been; the kid desperately shoots a web, yanking himself across the ground to the opposite wall, holding his side and gasping as his back hits it harshly, unable to stop his momentum.

Toomes spreads his wings in the broken, sparking, absolutely demolished war zone of a lab and approaches. Peter puts up his hand, gasping for breath, as if that will do something. He shoots a web that Adrian easily breaks through. The boy shoots fires another in desperation that Toomes flicks away, each shot getting more and more sloppy as the man closes in. Toomes reaches down and Peter struggles, letting out muffled, unintelligent cries that are a weak attempt at words as he tries to crawl away. But Adrian's there, planting a kick to his shoulder, which slams him into the ground, before reaching and gripping the teen by the throat.

Peter coughs, struggling on the floor and clutching at his hand, his lenses widening. There is a minute of struggle between the two of them, face to face, Toomes' green eyes bearing into the bright lenses that are filled with horror. He can feel Peter shaking underneath his grasp and after an attempt to fight him off, Peter realizes he won't win and his hands come to clutch the iron grip around his throat, his struggle slowing. Toomes loosens his graso, feeling the boy's throat strain beneath his fingers.

"Peter, take off your mask," he directs.

The boy makes out a curse, a small yell of pain ripping out of his mouth as he kicks uselessly at the nearest part of Toomes' suit he can reach. He furiously twists his head in the man's grip. Adrian repeats himself, voice calm. "Take off the mask, kid. Don't make me punch it off."

Peter stills and after a second, Toomes looming over him with wings spread, the boy, still gripping his hand, becomes visible. The suit retracts, receding to his neck line and the teen gasps. Tears stain his dust coated cheeks, and blood covers his face. He's already got a black eye and a busted lip that look reopened, so those must be from earlier. But there is still damage done, and Peter's layered breathing is enough to confirm that. Toomes takes in the small noises of pain that come from the boy staring at him in fear. Then he reaches, still allowing the bright green eyes to shake Peter's core for a bit longer, before he takes off his own mask.

The boy averts his eyes, even squeezing them shut and Toomes snarls, "Look at me."

Peter, breathing hard, dares to raise his glance slowly, searching his face, eyes widening in horror at the burns and at the eye patch, which Toomes removes as well, making the boy squirm, still unable to form words. It wasn't like he would if Toomes let him; he was in horrible shock from the cauterized skin that had molded over his ruined eye. Peter's lips purse and his jaw clenches, his eyes burning into Toomes' solid gaze.

"Do you see what you did to me?" he asks quietly as Peter's eyes trail over his charred skin. Adrian's shaking in anger now, his eye flashing as he hisses, "Do you understand how long I have waited for this moment?"

Peter twists in his grasp in fury and Toomes snarls as he shoves him against the wall, Peter crying out which releases precious air. The kid chokes, tears welling in his frightened eyes as he glances upwards.

"And it was easier than I thought," he scoffs in disappointment. "I mean, I at least thought there would be a fight..." He's about to say something else when he catches sight of something in Peter's ear. it was only for a split second, when the boys curls that were plastered to his face from blood and sweat moved that he swore he saw something.

He frowns as he trails off and as a response to his silence, the kid tenses beneath his grasp, gaze alert and panicked. Toomes exchanged looks with his enemy and smiles, forcefully turning his head despite the boy's protests. Peter's panic increases once he realizes what Toomes sees and he's making small stifled sounds of desperation, fighting him harder. Toomes grins once he sees what it is and chuckles, reaching forward with his free hand to take out the ear piece despite Peter's squirming.

"I see we have an audience member," Toomes says happily. He lets the boy go once he has it, Peter falling to his side, gasping for desperately needed air despite his cracked ribs, curling up and coughing through his rapid breaths. Keeping his eyes on him, Toomes puts it in his ear, already knowing who it is.

He speaks sweetly, "Hi Tony."

Chapter End Notes

DUNDUNDUNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN

Well, much like the title- jk EXACTLY like the title, everything goes to crap! Ahhh this was such a fun one to write, believe it or not that Toomes v Peter fight scene lit took 2 days I kept rewriting it it was crazy XD So this one was likeeeee 10.8k it was originally 12k and then I was like WAIT i need to place the break hereeeee so sorry this one took a slight while but good news is ive got 2k words written for next chapter already hahaha

So huzzah XD

ANYWAY a lot went down this chapter and there is still a lot more to go down. Rip Klaue I rly liked him but it had to happen :((((ummmm now Toomes and Peter have had their little reunion and Tony is a couple minutes away now. Darn suit. Darn antagonists. We love that haha

So how are yallllll for me week two of school is down, which is an accomplishment i guess? Virtual still sucks but hey its cool. I have books to read teehee heres my problem, I can read normal books, and write, but the minute its for school im like >:((((N O. Idk if thats just me

ANYWAY i ALSO watched Devil All The Time? Rly slow but I mean Tom holland was i love him. Its def R tho dang. Ummmmm what else do I need to watch there was something else and idk what it was so thats ANNOYING. I hope yall are having a great day, hopefully this kickstarts a good weekend for yall, and I hope you liked the chapter!

Next chapter will be out hopefully same time frame and were just gonna keep the ball rollin so strap in for this rough ride. Pleaseeee leave a comment on what you thought, yall are amazing and so encouraging!

Tony and Peter edits make me die and ummmm smoothies are good. And obv coffee in fact imma go make some.

So stay healthy! Stay tuned! Drink coffee! Get sleep because i heard thats good for you, and hang in there everybody :)

I love you 3000 <3 <3

Revenge is a Dish Best Served Cold

Chapter Notes

Hi lovely readers <3 <3 hope you guys are doing well! I need more coffee XD its been a very stressful and packed week so i rly rly hope yall like this chapter i got it out ASAP. Updates! Sleep deprivation is cool, coffee is a life saver, and ummmm bagels are good? Dont mind me over here making no sense. Oh YEAH! Cool news....I got into my top college!!! So thank you all because for those of u who dont know, my essay was about writing and partly about posting on here and how its been my stress reliever and just an awesome part of my life so yall made this happen :))) thank you guys sm for all your support and comments on last chap were AMAZING so thank you!!

Hmmmm this chapter muhahahha, well everything gets tied up here. Lots of action, no breaks, and if ur wondering why this is so hard on angst, thank leah :)))

Fights nearly 99% of the time, lots of back and forth, true colors, etc etc. Were in the endgame now so i rly hope you guys enjoy this final fight <3 It was a blast to write haha sorry to keep yall on the edge of ur seat

Hope school is going well, or at least not 100% crappy (virtual sucks, ill just keep repeating it) and i hope you guys have a great day!!

Read on awesome peopleeeeeee! (off topic question if you write peopleeeee how do you say that out loud because the e is silent. *brain explodes* ok well on THAT note, go read XD)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There is nothing worse than hearing your child scream when there's nothing you can do about it. Tony was urging his suit to stay with him, his thrusters spluttering as he staggered across the sky. The link to Peter was choppy and staticy, but he still heard the explosion. He *heard* the sound of Peter slamming into the ground and crying out, his voice becoming muffled. If Tony closed his eyes, he could practically see his kid curled up on himself as the world around him shattered into a blur of smoke and fire, breathing hard through gritted teeth, in a tight ball. And he had never been more scared in his life.

The amount of fear and rage that sank into his veins and traveled throughout his whole body the minute he heard his kid ask who was coming towards him- Tony had never felt anything like it. He had heard that tone a couple times before, while Peter was tortured by Damian, *but he had been there*. Now he was not there. And he would not get there. And he knew what was coming.

"Tony, he's here, I don't know what to do- I don't know what to do-" the scared teenager pleads in a state of panic and Tony mumbles off the best response he can, hating himself in that moment for not putting aside the overwhelming emotions he's feeling to help the kid who just had his worst nightmare blow up his home.

Toomes' voice had cut through to his ears very soon after that, and Tony flinched, dipping in air in fury when he heard Peter suck in a breath and let out a shaking exhale that masked a sob. It was almost as if he could sense the tears in the boy's eyes through the phone.

And a little later, Peter breaks his heart yet again. *"Tony, it's Toomes- but he's dead. He's supposed*

to be dead- Tony, it's Toomes."

The way he said the last word. Oh God- Yes, he was supposed to be dead. Yes, they were both played. And he wasn't there to protect him from possibly Peter's worst fear. He can't say anything to make him feel better, or tell him that it's not true, heck, he couldn't even promise to protect him. "I know kiddo, I know-" he says, squeezing his eyes shut and pouring everything into his tone that he can to make it the total opposite of the expression on his face. "Peter, listen to me. Don't let him find you. I'm almost there."

He wasn't almost there. He was very very far away. Too far. With no one to contact- even Steve wasn't picking up. The silence that follows is Peter recognizing his helplessness, but choosing to not make him feel worse about it. Even in the worst situations, Peter has a way of being selfless. And the fact that tears were more than likely streaming down his smoke and dust covered face right now, hurt Tony's heart and coats his vision in an even darker shade of red.

Tony clenched his jaw and steadied his tone. Peter had done enough. It was his turn. He talked him through avoiding the man, and he heard Peter stumbling down the hallway due to his enthusiasm, probably clutching his side of leg in pain because he could hear the slight limp. The boy coughed weakly and softly, afraid the man would hear him and he heard him stumble down steps. Steps. By the lobby- lab. Lab? Why the hell was he going to the-

"No- Peter no, get out of the lab-" Tony urged him, furiously shaking his head. There was no exit. There was a wall you could break, but there was no door. It was pretty much a dead end.

"Tony, I can't make it to the garage-" Peter admits quietly and Tony's face falls. *"And- and I need my suit, I can barely breathe-"* the boy said miserably, his tone alone causing FRIDAY to mute his mic on instinct as Tony let out a choked scream. Tony was shaking. In anger, in fear, in self hatred, he couldn't decide what. All because of Peter's defeated tone. It almost sounded like he was apologizing, as if he had failed Tony- well, he hadn't.

"I have an idea...I'll be fine-"

The idea was absurd, and both of them knew that he would have to fight Toomes when it came down to it. But when Peter's cracked voice came through again, his words echoed exactly what Tony had told him not to do. *"Oh God- Tony- I- I need to lead him over here- he's going to shoot DUM-E."*

That immediately floored Tony. He tried to find words to tell him...something, but Tony couldn't. He just whispered harshly, "Peter, be careful." He hears the boy do...something, Tony didn't know what, but whatever Peter did, there was a small noise and then silence. The comms are quiet for a split second, and Tony can hear his own heart beating.

"Pete? Is that you?"

"Don't call him that you son of a-" Tony has to mute his mic and bite his lip all at once, clenching his teeth so hard he tastes blood. He takes a second to compose himself, FRIDAY actually popping up a warning that alerts him he had actually pressed his thrusters harder at what that bastard dared to call his kid. Somehow, he manages to ease back to conserve energy.

It may seem like a silly thing to get worked up over to some, but to them it wasn't. 'Pete' was his nickname, used only by him. Peter knew that. Tony knew that. Everyone knew that. And Peter corrected everyone regardless if they did it on purpose or if they just forgot. But now the boy was silent, and whether or not that was caused by fear or the need to stay hidden, Tony knew it hurt Peter more than it hurt him.

He could hear Toomes muffled walk when he entered the room, and the sound of his boots scraping across the floor. It was much more ominous muffled, and Tony held his breath, afraid he might compromise the kid who was trying to slip past undetected. But when he heard Peter's breathing speed up in his ears, he cursed to himself. Tony had watched the kid fight, he knew his every move, so he could almost tell what was happening even without seeing. Call it a sixth sense, if you wanted, but it was the same reason why he knew if Peter was hurt in any way he would feel it in his bones.

So Tony could tell Peter jumped and by the sound of it, kicked the man square in the back. Tony strained his ears and heard the whir of the engines and Toomes' grunt of pain as he went sprawling, probably crashing through a wall.

"Smart Pedro. Very smart. I upgraded too."

It's then that Tony shoves the man's taunting voice out of his head and focuses on the boy who is breathing in massive gasps, letting out shaky breaths like he's trying to stop himself from having a panic attack. He probably is having a panic attack-

"Pete, don't answer," Tony urges him, reminding him of their nickname and who used it. "Just focus on me, kid. I'll walk you through this but you have to stick with me and right now I need you to calm down. Don't say a word. Just breathe."

The boy does what he's told and begins to take slow breaths, before he hears the kid exhale shakily and probably do some kind of tuck and roll, getting to his feet-

That's when Tony hears the first yell of pain. He knows he'll hear many more, but the first one was still the worst. Tony flinches at it like he had been shot, his entire body shaking as he sucks in a breath. He hears the boy land and desperately scramble back, a rumbling hitting his ears.

"You're dead," Peter speaks quietly a second later, anger and terror lacing his voice.

"Don't listen to him, Peter. Block him out," Tony repeats again, this time more firmly. The more time Peter gave him to talk, or an opening for conversation, Toomes would use that to his advantage and do what he did best: get under Peter's skin. He was the first person who was able to do that.

Of course, he hears a muffled response from Toomes like he knew he would and at that, Peter let's out a sound Tony doesn't think a human is possible of making. Before he knows it, Tony is kicking in the boosters again, ignoring FRIDAY's warning this time. He's getting to his kid as fast as he can or he's falling to his death.

"Break whatever you need to Peter, move fast, do not let him near you," he instructs firmly.

Tony hears a clash of commotion and then it's just torture. The sounds of pain that come from the crackling comm make hot tears build in Tony's eyes as he urges his dying suit faster. He hears the boy's head hit the ground harder than it ever should and Peter lets out a gasp of pain. He hears the kid swear, *"Shut up,"* and dares to hope, but at Peter's strangled yell combined with the sound of engines, Tony knows he's closer to Toomes than he ever wanted him to be. Peter lets out a groan before Tony hears a solid punch and a crack, that he hopes is anything other than Peter's bones. The boy is breathing hard and he hears his next breath get wet before the teen chokes and coughs up a mouthful of blood.

Tony curses, urges his suit faster, conscious of the thruster that's practically half dead already. He closes his eyes and listens to the context clues he's given before he speaks sharply, "Peter, listen to

me. You're a Stark. You don't give up. Get your legs out and get him in a headlock, then use whatever iron bracers you have left to flip. You understand me? We did this in training."

Peter lets out a groan and Tony winces at the feedback as the fighting roars in his ears. From Toomes' angry yell and the shift in power, he realizes the boy took his advice, but that he's still locked in contact with him. In a state of panic, Tony demands, "Peter, disengage, he'll beat you hand to hand."

He hears the boy shove himself away and begin to stand and that's when Tony hears the roar of engines spin and get louder. He's going for him. He's diving straight for him and Peter will jump. He knows he will. So does Toomes. It's only a split second but Tony barks out, "Pete, DROP!"

To have someone trust you may be something as plain as being able to tell you a secret and knowing you'll keep it, or returning something that had belonged to you. Simple as that. To Tony and Peter, trust went much deeper, and it was much different. Trust for them was Tony's voice overriding every single split second fight or flight instinct he had that screamed *JUMP*. It was his voice overcoming every spider sense that told him to get to the ceiling *NOW*. It even overrode his own thoughts that if he did anything but jump he was a dead man.

Peter drops. Tony hears the boy suck in a breath and then get up. "Go, go, go-" Tony says quickly and Peter lets out a groan as he heeds his warning, shooting a web from his wrist and yanking himself forward. He then let out a cry of pain as he crashed into something, but Tony breaths a sigh of relief when he realizes that that had not been Toomes' doing but just the downfall of their surroundings. A sigh of relief from a cry of pain. Oh God.

Peter's breathing alone made Tony want to scream in anger, *"Why are you here Toomes-"*

"Don't give him time to get to you-" Tony hisses urgently and Peter doesn't. "Use your surroundings, kid. If he's down, don't stop. That's your opening, take it." He thinks Peter does what he suggests, because the boy seems more focused, at least until he addresses his enemy directly again, despite Tony's protests.

"I should have killed you," Peter swears angrily, and Tony's teeth clench at the break in his voice. It's then that really scares him. It's then that he knows Peter can't beat him. Because of what he had just said. He hadn't killed him, and he never would if he was given the opportunity. He might want to with everything in him, with every burning fiber in his body, but Peter was no killer. That was his greatest strength, but right now it was his downfall. And that was the twisted reason why Toomes would always be one up on him.

Judging from the villains voice that crackles through the comms, Toomes' recognizes his advantage now too. *"You're right. That's twice now, for both of us. So, what do you say, Pete, you in for the tie breaker?"*

"It's Peter you son of a-" And then Tony hears- he *hears* the wind knocked- no, forced out of Peter's lungs as he's hit in the chest and he swears he hears a rib break. Peter doesn't scream, because he can't- because he physically *can't* breathe. But Tony does scream, and after a second of commotion, he also hears the sound of metal on metal behind his ears and Peter lets out a scream.

And he almost pitches forward, restabilizing himself mid air, shaking in fury. Did that bastard just rack his wing down Peter's back-

Tony finds his voice and cries out, squeezing his eyes shut and forcing words through his gritted teeth, "Peter, breathe. Breathe, I know- I know kid, breathe. Take a breather-" he continues rambling because he has no good response. And then every piece of his body seems to shatter at

the one word Peter croaks.

Peter whispers, "*T-ony-*" and can't get out anything else. And that's when Tony knows it's about to get a lot worse. The boy can't breathe. He's scared. He's in pain. He's tired-

"Stick with me, kiddo, you hear me. You keep fighting, I'm almost there I promise, I promise. I'm so close, you just hang in there for a couple more minutes-" Tony doesn't know what to do but keep giving him encouragement because there's no way he's going to stay silent with all the silent groans of pain and small strangled cries flooding into his ears over the next minute. Peter holds his own, Tony flinching, his voice being sucked away with every yell that meets him.

The scream that stops him is the one that makes him nearly drop out of the sky. It's practically torn from Peter's throat and another smaller one follows once he connects with whatever he was thrown into, along with a lot of groaning and gasping. "Kid- oh God-" Tony makes out weakly. His attention is on Toomes now, his invisible enemy, and he yells, "STOP IT! STOP!" He trusts Peter knows who his shouts are directed to; he can hear the boy desperately trying to hold back tears.

The second scream that follows is worse because it seems almost like a sob. Peter's voice breaks and is cut off as he slams into something, chopping up the blood-curling yell of pain. He coughs, and Tony can hear his wet gasp. He chokes out a gurgle that cracks into a sob and Tony screams, "PETE!" tears streaming down the man's face.

Peter lets out a strangled sound of exhaustion, not able to breathe without pain audibly being voiced in his yelps. He hits something hard after sliding, going silent except for his horrible breathing and muffled whimpers he's trying to swallow.

"You're okay. You're okay," Tony whispers, squeezing his eyes shut. "I'm here, I'm right here. Don't let him near you, kid, give me everything you've got. I'm almost there, I'm almost there kiddo."

Tony's face was screwed up in torture because of Peter's breathing, but after it suddenly cut off in surprise, he would have given anything to hear it again. A second later, his bones chill, his eyes widen, his mouth opens to plead. In the suit, Tony's hands are clenched when he hears the boy gasp desperately for breath. His stomach flips, tying the knot tighter than it's ever been when he realizes Toomes has Peter by the throat.

"You BASTARD, let him GO!" Tony roars in fury, the lump in his throat getting bigger as he listens to the sounds Peter is making. They make him nauseous. They literally make him nauseous. His voice is shaking, his eyes stinging, his chest feeling that it's being crushed by the rocks he seems to have swallowed.

"Kid, I'm sorry- I'm so sorry, kid-" Tony gasps out, his throat closing like he's the one having the life choked out of him

"Peter, take off your mask."

Tony has never been quicker to say anything in his entire life. He finds his voice and speaks lowly and with firmness, "Do it. Peter, I know you don't want to but he will hurt you more if you don't. Do what he says, kiddo, please, trust me."

All he needs is those two words and the struggling stops. Sure enough, once he does, that awful gasp of air meets Tony's ears and he somehow breathes a sigh at that. Something that made him scream in anger a couple minutes ago was now something to be relived about. Oh, how things had escalated to the point where Tony wondered if he was ever going to be able to look at himself

again if they got through this.

"Look at me."

"Pete, do what he says," Tony urges against his will, his left thruster completely shutting off. He curses as he dips in the air and reverts power, shutting off his display so that he can fly blind without the navigation but still be connected to Peter. "FRIDAY, keep me stable!" he snaps in his internal mic. He knows where he's going. And he's so close, but not close enough.

Harsh breathing and periodic noises of pain come from the kid that is gripping Tony's soul with a burning cold fist.

"Do you see what you did to me? Do you understand how long I have waited for this moment?"

He hears Peter let out a sound of defiance and struggle and Tony's eyes squeeze shut, tears streaming down his cheeks. There's a thud and Tony flinches, growling, "You son of a- leave him ALONE!" Then he can't help himself, he cries out the boy's name, "PETER!" and hears a sob in response.

"And it was easier than I thought. I mean, I at least thought there would be a fight..."

Silence.

Tony's blood is boiling but he suddenly gets chills.

No noise is worse.

So much worse.

His heart leaps to his throat and Tony swallows it down, tasting pennies. He pleads softly at first, his voice steadily rising, "Peter, please tell me you're still there- what's going on? Talk to me kid, say something- let me know you're okay!" Tony hears him all right, but it's anything but comforting. If the previous screams were dipped and slathered in pain and fear, this was a different flavor of fear, and this was panic and desperation. The boy shouts in protests, his sound muffled as he rips screams through his clenched teeth and closed throat.

"Peter, what's going on? Peter? PETE!" Tony begs.

The boy is making sobbing sounds of pain and Tony winches at a high pitch ringing that makes him cry out, bringing his ear to his shoulder. The static worsens and then stops, the ear piece adjusted.

Tony licks his lips and shouts, "Peter, God, kid, PLEASE!"

"Hi Tony."

Toomes drops the audible bomb and then waits. There's a massive pause from the man who is on the other line, but it's filled with words and rage. The man's voice comes out dangerously low, *"Toomes, I swear to God-"*

"Wow, no welcome back?" Toomes asked with a hurt scoff. "Glad you're not dead? Nothing?"

"You listen to me, I'm gonna kill you myself. Where's Peter?"

Toomes frowns and makes a face, "That spider is the center of attention. Which leads to my question, why did you leave him at home?" Toomes tisks. Then he stops, "Or *was* the center of attention. I just killed him." He waits a heartbeat just to hear the confusion and disbelief on the other line. When the silence turns to shock and pain, he continues, snickering, "I'm kidding. I had you there for a second though, didn't I, Stark?"

"I will end you, I'll-" Tony promises, trailing off in anger, his voice laced with venom. He repeats his question more violently and any sane person would be scared by the tone he uses. *"Where is he?"*

Toomes cuts him off and looks down at the boy who is still on his side trying to breath and winces apologetically, "I'm sorry, but Peter can't come to the phone right now." In the empty static, Tony Stark was begging him. *Tony Stark* was begging *him*.

"You will wish you were dead after I'm through with you. Whatever you do to him I will do a million times worse-"

Toomes sighs in annoyance and announces, "What were you thinking, leaving a kid alone like this? Anyone could come and try and kill him."

"Toomes-"

"Ah, ah," Toomes cuts him off. "Don't you want to know how I did it? Regardless of if you do or not, I'm telling you anyway and there's a quiz at the end so take notes. If you need some incentive, know who's listening. What happened was, I visited an old friend of yours."

Tony pauses on the other line, understanding the vague threat and how serious he was. Adrian gladly fills in the blank, "General Ross. He confirmed my little theory that you and Peter were inseparable. Well, inseparable to a fault because...I don't see you Tony?" he looks around and smiles. "I knew you'd leave him behind to-" he mocks him with a long sigh, "to protect him. I was counting on someone to be here 'guarding Peter' because your little codependency problem wouldn't allow you to leave him alone, so I needed a distraction. And what do you know, Klaue played his part perfectly. Of course, he didn't mean to give me that assist, he was actually doing the opposite."

Toomes sighs and rubs his chin, sighing in dissapointment, "He really wanted to help you guys, didn't want to get behind killing the kid," he admitted with a frown. "What a shame. An international drug dealer gone soft." Toomes shakes his head and shrugs, "Well, he got what was coming to him."

"Get away from Peter you bast-"

"Tony, Tony, I'm not done yet and I'm just so tempted to get in another kick with this kid at my feet- don't tell me you forgot about him *again*," Toomes gasped in shock. That- *that*, shut Tony up quick. There was furious silence, soaked with guilt. Toomes waits an agonizing second before continuing, *"And then*, Ross told me a friend on the Board who was willing to help! You may have cut off the head of the serpent, Tony, but there are plenty more willing and ready to strike. One of them being Rick Mayfield. Ring a bell?"

He scoffs his foot into the ground in deep thought and asks, "Wonder why you can't get into contact with the suits here? Why you can't contact your friends? Why Captain America can't either by the way, if you're wondering why he went radio silent," he smiled, before looking down in distaste at the teenager that had yet to stop coughing. Toomes sighed and requested, "Peter, I'm on the phone."

"Don't you say a WORD to him you cocky son of a-"

"Tony! Strike two!" Toomes reminded him sharply, smiling at the cut off of Tony's words before he could even deliver the curse. And just to piss the man off, he dove immediately back into thought, "Maybe you've been wondering why none of the systems around here are working? Maybe you connected the dots since there happened to be a random router check in progress? Mayfield left you high and dry and I just took advantage of it. I took advantage of Klaue, who got Steve out of the picture, and now I have your kid, so I just have one question for you, Tony. How did you let that all happen?" he asked loudly.

He had expected to hear the man fuming on the other line but all he heard was guilt-racked agreement in the static. Toomes smirked at that and hissed, "You really deserve the Worst Father of the Year Award because, and I could be mistaken, but last I checked, you're not supposed to leave your kids to die at the hands of their enemies."

Peter snarls in anger, attempting to grab at his leg, coughing up blood onto the ground and Toomes scrunches his nose up and grits his teeth, "Peter, for the love of God, wait your turn."

He slams his foot into the boy's chest, sending him flat onto his back, talons clasped around his chest before Peter can roll away. The teen brings his head up, eyes squeezed shut in pain. It's then, when he sees that same expression, that he realizes this was the exact same thing that happened on the beach so long ago...when he had spared the boy's life. Peter opens his mouth to scream in pain and somehow swallows it, pressing back against the metal that is digging into his chest, arching his back against the floor and squirming in pain as he gasps for air.

"Don't hurt him-" Tony says quietly in his ear. *"Leave him alone Toomes, don't touch him-"*

Toomes snickers, his eyes flashing, "A little late for that." He looks down at the helpless boy who's clenching his fists in pain and anger and decides he wants nothing more than to kill two birds with one stone. He had known he would go downhill, but at this point, he barely recognized his own voice as he whispered, "Ready? You have to listen, Tony."

With an expression void of emotion, he presses his foot down harder into Peter's chest and the boy meets his eyes defiantly, but in shock, holding his breath, face red with effort. Toomes frowns and digs his talons in harder with a snarl and curled lip. Peter's nose starts to bleed from the force of holding back the scream that is trying to tear itself from his throat. Toomes is pressing with no avail, and Peter starts to lose consciousness as he holds back his cry of pain, his hand falling away from the foot digging him into the ground with enough force to crack a normal human's ribs.

He hears Tony in his ear muttering, *"Peter, no, it's okay, it's okay- Peter, please- STOP IT TOOMES- I SAID STOP! I'm gonna- PETE-"*

There's no possible way Peter heard him, maybe it was just coincidence, but the broken sound of Tony's voice is reflected in the boy's cry he finally lets out between his violent coughing and sob breaths, slamming his head into the ground to try and cope with the pain, writhing on the floor. Another set of tears trail down his cheeks stained in blood, sweat, and dust.

Tony's yell matches Peter's as the man shouts in fury, making Toomes wince in feedback and in fear of the man's sincerity, *"Leave him alone, you bastard- I swear to God. I'm going to kill you, you hear me, I swear I'll rip you limb from limb-"*

"That's very sweet of you, but it's really all empty threats," Toomes interrupts, easing the pressure off of the kid's chest, watching as he takes a big gulp of air before he grips his stomach. "I am flattered though," Adrian decides, "and I'm glad you liked that little greeting from your son."

Congratulations to you two by the way, very cool. You guys always were quite the father son duo. Unfortunately, that will be the last you hear of him. Peter, say goodbye."

Peter, shaking on the floor, looks up in utter terror and he gasps out, "T-ny- *TONY!*"

"Aw, he said your name. Isn't that adorable," Toomes snarls, his lip curling. "Bye Stark."

"NO! Peter! PETE! Don't touch him, you hear me? Don't even TOUCH him. I will find you and I will take you apart piece by-"

Toomes yanks out the earpiece and drops it carelessly.

And it clatters against the floor.

He turns on Peter who snarls, staring at it the ear piece brokenly from on the floor, eyes welling with tears. It may still be on, Toomes doesn't know, but he doesn't crush it. "Well that was fun," Toomes shrugs, grinning at the boy who is glaring at him. His eyes flash, swimming in red.

"I know you hate me, Peter," Toomes nods in understanding, dissecting Peter's loathsome gaze. "But I hate you too. You took my family away from me." He shakes his head and says firmly but quietly, "And I will never forgive you for that."

"And do you think-" Peter croaks out, his voice trembling, clutching his side as he straightens, breathing hard. "Do you think that they would be proud of you?"

"You asked me that before, Peter, and my answer is still the same. I did this for them, and you will not be able to convince me otherwise. This ends with one of us dying. For good this time," he adds, trying a smile because somehow that seemed appropriate. "I can see the hope in your eyes. You still think Tony will come running in to save you." He shakes his head in disbelief and just plain bewilderment. His face screws up in an emotion he doesn't know how to define, "You *trust* him, to protect you?"

"Because he always has," Peter says brokenly. He grabs the wall and slowly gets to his feet, and Toomes lets him, even taking a step back. He watches him with careful eyes, his adrenaline pumping because in his mind, he's holding a life in his hands. The boy is gripping his wounded side and he speaks very quietly, looking at Toomes with narrowed but pleading eyes. His voice is hoarse from being deprived of oxygen and bruised. He leans against the walls and whispers, "You'd do anything for your family."

"I would," Toomes nods, raising his arm simply. Death was simple. This was a matter of revenge. He had imagined this moment many times while in jail, none had he envisioned a scenario where Peter was this calm. But Toomes realized this was better. The boy wasn't crying or begging, he was resigning.

Peter nods in approval and croaks out, "I'd do anything for mine." His last spider leg retracts into the suit and he looks down, hanging his head, sweat and blood dripping off his curls. When he looks up, the bangs plaster to his forehead and the liquid slides down his face, traveling over the dust and dirt. Peter's voice is quiet and what he says, Toomes was not expecting, but he should have been.

"It stops after this. Don't hurt Tony when he gets here."

Toomes nods in confusion, confused Peter thinks he's in the position to negotiate, confused why he's allowing it and why he knows he now has to honor the deal. It's a twisted moment and he admits softly, "I hate him. But it stopped being about him a long time ago."

"So then do it," Peter hisses, straightening with effort, showing no signs that he was going to dive out of the way or fight back. "Do it, Toomes." The boy flinches, his gaze flicking down to the earpiece, and Adrian considers for a second that it could be still on. There was no other reason why tears were streaming down Peter's cheeks. The boy had never been afraid of dying. Scared, maybe. Afraid, no. In Toomes' mind those two synonyms had very different meanings, and he left it up to fate to interpret what he meant.

Toomes snarls, a blast heating up and he releases it. It spirals for Peter's heart and the kid doesn't move.

Tony had nothing left. He doesn't even have coms. They died and he wasn't sure which end caused the connection to cut out, him or Toomes, but it sent shock waves of fear through his body. His suit was dying as he dropped in free fall into the compound, ripping off the helmet so he could see once he flew low enough. Coughing through the smoke that looked like a dark blanket fluttering in the wind, he dove into the blown up portion of the building and managed to skim the floor, sparks flying in his wake. Tony banks a corner, one of his palms sputtering out and he hits the floor, hard, rolling and slamming into a pile of rubble, head smacking against the stones.

Not taking more than a second recovery, he fires up his remaining boosters and presses forward, crashing through the first wall like it was made of paper, putting up his arm to cover his head as he did. He's almost to the first lab and FRIDAY shouts, *"He's about to fire-"*

"GIVE ME EVERYTHING WE HAVE LEFT!" Tony yells in desperation, eyes narrowed.

"The remaining power will-"

"DO IT NOW, FRIDAY!" There's no question. That lunatic was about to kill his kid. Tony would fight him hand to hand if he had to, there was no way he was going let Toomes go through with it.

Tony shoots forward with incredible speed through the last wall, tucking and rolling. On the second half of his roll, he has less than a second to make his decision. As he gets to his feet he puts up his hand, seeing Toomes aim a blast at Peter who's standing limp against the wall. He has no targeting system. He's too far away to tackle him. Tony stretches his palm, closes one eye, and fires in one fluid motion.

His beam hits Toomes straight in the arm and the Vulture's blast scorches the wall a half a foot from Peter's head. The boy's head whips over in shock and Tony makes a split second of eye contact with him before he's facing Toomes.

"I said don't touch my kid you bastard," Tony growls, firing up the remaining power in his thruster and palm, kicking off the other peeling metal that's only slowing him down. He slams into the Vulture, hard in the chest, and the man flies backward and hits the wall, staggering. Tony fires a precious blast at a very weak looking section of the ceiling and the second half of the lab caves in, burying Toomes under the rubble. The man's yell of anger is buried. Tony puts up his hand to avoid getting hit by the wave of dust that came up before he coughs and turns around.

"That won't hold him for long," Tony says quickly, hurrying over to the kid who was pressed against the wall clutching his side, covered in blood. "I never should have left you," he says weakly, grabbing Peter's outstretched arm, slipping a hand around his back and helping him to his feet.

"You didn't know," Peter groans in pain, his leg buckling until he locks his knees with effort.

"I *should have* known," Tony says, wincing as he holds the kid up straight and steadies him. He speaks sharply, no room for softness in his voice now; he needed to get them out of this. "You're not dying on me again, you understand me? I told you I was coming." He wanted to pull the kid into a hug and never let him go, sink to his knees and clutch the back of his head like he was his entire world. But he knew he couldn't.

"I was just stalling," Peter says weakly, his voice deprived of emotion except for a small crack. If they let emotion run this, they were dead. It was the reason they split up in the first place, the reason Tony walked out so many months ago, the reason why Peter had not followed him, and why he had agreed to stay. They knew what was at stake here. They knew the severity. They knew how they had to act, even if it meant shoving every single word and gesture aside they wanted to do. The man knows this is no time for a reunion despite how desperately he wants a proper one, or time to address Peter's injuries, despite how serious they are.

"Can you walk?" Tony demands quickly, locking eyes with the boy, letting a wave of relief wash over him as the chocolate eyes that are blinking away tears look at him with trust. It's all said in a simple look of agreement. It's less than two seconds, but it somehow does its job, and Tony doesn't even need to analyze what it meant, he just knew. And the simplicity of it all was what he treasured most.

"Yeah-" Peter says urgently, before he freezes, eyes alert, turning his head only a fraction before snapping it back. The boy should have gotten whiplash from that movement, but somehow he doesn't, instead, he finds the strength to launch Tony across the room, the man skidding across the floor as the rubble explodes, pieces of ceiling impaling the room at all angles. Vulture rises from the pile of dust faster than Tony thought he would, underestimating the power and strength of the suit. He watches helplessly as the enemy flies past him and slams into Peter, pinning him against the wall, the boy crying out in pain as he kicks and struggles. The world rains down around him, Tony rolling to avoid getting crushed by a massive chunk of the ceiling that had been smothering their enemy yet seconds ago.

He's on his feet almost immediately, putting out his palm and praying. Sure enough, a gauntlet he had been repairing rips itself free of the rocky tomb in the corner of the lab and skips forward, folding over his waiting hand. Tony sprints forward and slides under a wing that tried to knock him on his back, kicking Toomes in the leg to drop him to his knees before slamming his thinly armored palm into his chin. Peter gets dropped, sliding down against the wall. With a growl of defiance, he fires a web at the man's leg, yanking him down as well before he can get up.

Tony rips off the helmet that's dangling at his chest and throws it aside, punching Toomes across the face. The man snarls and twists, his wings trapping Tony between each other before they fling him to the side. Tony hits the ground and rolls, smacking against the wall and Peter cries out when Toomes doesn't return his attention to the teen. Instead he goes for Tony and stabs his wing downward, the man rolling away as the sharp metal impales itself in the floor with an awful sound.

"Stark," the Vulture tisks, hissing as he yanks his wing out of the floor, ripping it up. "You had to ruin all the fun," he says delicately, eyes flashing.

"Sorry, I know three's a crowd," Tony snarls back, firing up his thruster to shove himself to the side as Toomes launches forward, finding himself buried in the wall due to his momentum. Tony goes sliding across the floor and stops near the center of the room, scrambling onto his elbows, his suit creaking. Peter is already limping to his side before Tony even blinks, helping him to his feet. Tony's hand goes in front of him and they stagger back as Toomes rips himself out of the concrete and plaster and turns on the two of them. Tony holds up a firey palm, Peter behind his shoulder.

They took shockingly similar in that moment, their looks and stances nearly identical.

"I just want the kid, Stark. I promised him I wouldn't involve you," Toomes informs him, his wings shaking the dust off them. He clashes them together, the loud sound of screeching metal making both Stark's flinch.

"Well I'm involved now," Tony spits, disgusted by his twisted sense in loyalty the man has and indirectly furious with Peter for even making that call. "So do you need directions on how to screw yourself, or are you good with me just advising you to?"

"Stark-" Toomes starts, a final warning, Tony can tell.

Tony glares at him with hate, his entire body shaking, eyes soaked in red, hot tears clouding his vision but he's never seen clearer. His ears are filled with Peter's screaming, from the Goblin, from Damian, from Toomes. His jaw flexes as it clenches, his teeth aching as he clenches them. He's never been so angry, his hand shaking from where it's leveled, the blood boiling in his veins. He snarls calmly, looking the man dead in the eyes, "You hurt my kid. I'm going to rip you apart."

"Without a suit?" the Vulture asks innocently, flexing his wings to try and be intimidating, the black metal gleaming.

"With my bare hands," Tony agrees, a protective flash in his eyes. His voice was even and painstakingly serious. It wasn't a threat. It was a promise.

"How can you fight me," Toomes asks slowly, a small smirk in his gaze as he flicks his eyes back and forth between the two. "While also worried about protecting Pete over there?"

In a way...Toomes had just delivered a massive hit, but then stopped it before it could connect with Tony's gut. Yes, he worried about protecting Peter and his heart dropped when Toomes said that. He felt his confidence ebbing. Tony's knees started to give out and for a minute he was scared, scared that he wasn't going to be able to protect the kid even if he gave his best, and that fear took over. It twisted in his gut and made it hard for him to breathe-

And then Toomes called Peter 'Pete'.

Everything was washed away by anger when he saw Peter wince out of the corner of his eye and felt the boy's flinch since they were close enough their arms were touching. Any feeling *he* had was gone, peeled away to reveal the fury that lay kept for when someone hurt the teen behind him. Tony snarled and stepped forward with narrowed eyes. He growled dangerously, "Don't call him that-"

Peter puts a hand on his chest and arm, effectively holding him back with no more strength than it took to lift a feather. The look in the boy's eyes said enough. Tony concentrated on steadying his breathing and returned his gaze to his enemy.

"So be it," Toomes shrugged, narrowing his eyes. There was a second of nothing- no movement, not even the sound of breathing- and then it all went in a chaotic downward plunge. Toomes shoot forward and Tony and Peter split, rolling to the sides. Toomes went for Peter who shot a web at his wing, yanking it downward. The man pitched with a grunt and went face first into the ground, getting to his feet and getting met with a blast to his back that sent him past Peter who sidestepped knowingly.

Tony put out his hand, fingers extended and the exploded suit from the other room, or what was left of it (which wasn't much), soared in and wrapped around his other palm and leg. He slammed

his foot hard across the man's face when he tried to retaliate, sending him into the floor before Peter brought one of the already shattered computers down on top of him.

Toomes snarled and twisted, his wings pulling him to his feet. He swiped Peter's legs out from under him and then batted him upwards into the ceiling. Peter cried out in pain, covered in rubble once he fell limp to the ground. His head, which had already taken too many shots, smacked *hard* and he slumped in pain, hands clutching his temples.

"I'm gonna kill you for that," Tony promised weakly, firing a series of blasts to keep the man away from the kid who was struggling to even get to his elbows under the remnants of the ceiling that pinned him to the ground. Peter was swaying, a clear sign of a concussion and Tony knew he couldn't defend himself right away.

Tony dove forward and slammed Toomes in the gut, pressing a palm into his chest and slowly melting away the armor as they locked arms. Tony's eyes burned with hatred and he threw an uppercut with his elbow, sending the Vulture stumbling back. The man grasped for him blindly and twisted, shoving Tony into the wall, his back cracking the concrete. In a tangle of limbs and curses, he brought up his arm just in time to block a punch, metal on metal. Tony kneed him in the stomach and then sent a pulse from his arc reactor that made Toomes loose his grip before he slammed his head into his knee.

Tony put out both of his palms and beamed him straight in the chest but not before the left wing, which seemed to have a mind of its own, raked him across the side, peeling away his armor. The other wing combined into a fine tip point and Tony felt a taloned hand slam into him, pinning him effectively against the wall. He twisted as the wing drove forward for his chest, but it never made contact.

A taunt and straining web was attached to the end of it, keeping the sharp point from sinking into Tony's side as he struggled to free himself. Toomes looked over his shoulder to the boy Tony knew was there but could not see. The man growled threateningly, "Peter, drop it!"

"You little shi-" Tony cursed before he was dug deeper into the wall, his chest plate cracking. He gasped in pain and Peter let out a sound of anger from behind him.

Toomes strained but a second web attached itself in that instant and pulled harder, stopping Toomes from breaking free. He knew there was no way he was going to be able to beat the boy who was maintaining his grip for all he was worth. After a brief struggle, and before Tony could move aside, Toomes muttered something along the lines of, *finish this*, and rather than stab Tony, he just clocked him across the head with the other wing. Pain explodes across his temple as his helmet flies off from the force, white dots clouding his vision as blood trickled down the side of his face. Tony went limp, his muscles no longer in control and he slumped to the ground, sliding down the wall, Toomes letting him fall from his grasp in disgust.

"Man in a suit of armor, but beneath it, what is there?" Toomes snarls. Tony looks up, his vision swimming, blood dripping from his lips.

The man towering over him shakes his head before twisting and cutting the web off of him with his free hand. The teen collapses from the sudden release and he hits the ground in exhaustion. Toomes sighs as he turns around, "Peter, I've had about enough of you."

Tony let out a low yell and Toomes straightened his back, one of the wings detaching and hitting him hard in the chest, clamping him to the ground when he tried to get up. Tony struggled beneath the armored clasp, his hands straight at his sides, unable to beam his way free.

Peter shoved himself out of the rubble and crawled backward weakly before he stopped, glanced at Tony, and steeled his gaze. He and Toomes face each other, and this time Tony is helpless to stop him.

Peter blinks. In that second, he goes through a scenario in his head. Toomes fires, whether that be after a fight involving a lot of pain, or before, just in the pain he's already in. Toomes still fires. Tony can't stop him this time. He's pinned in the corner, forced to watch helplessly. He'd have nightmares for years, Peter knows. They would never go away. The blast would hit Peter probably in the chest, his suit charring black as the fabric peels away in a matter of milliseconds. Whether it would go through him or just break every bone in his body, or if Toomes' explosive did something much worse, he didn't know. His eyes would freeze, rolling back into his head or staying, he wasn't sure. He guessed no one was sure.

He'll fall, and then Tony will scream. It will be worse than any one the man has ever let out, full of pain and anger and disbelief, and fear. Peter won't be able to comfort him. He might not even be able to hear it. In a selfish moment, he hopes he doesn't have to.

A tear would probably fall from his cheek, and his last look would be at Tony's face, blood and sweat dripping down it, eyes wide in...horror- a multitude of emotions Peter never wants to see. Again, he doesn't know if he would or not.

Peter will fall, Tony will scream, and Toomes will hopefully keep his agreement and leave without hurting his...father. He had never told him that. He had never called him anything other than Tony either. Life was indeed, too short. Cruel, and painful. Peter had always known that, but he had yet to combat it.

Tony will break free of the clasp eventually, cursing himself that he didn't find the strength sooner after watching Toomes leave. Something deep in his gut told him that Toomes would leave. He would. And it gave Peter a bad taste in his mouth. Tony would stand, clutching his head and letting out a sound that was a mix of a sob and yell. His vision would be swimming but somehow it would clear as he looked on the limp body in front of him.

Then he'll slowly walk over, or run- no, he'd walk- he'd stumble and collapse, practically diving to the floor. His knees would give out at Peter's side and he would fall with a sob in the dust, just so *tired*. Peter wanted to be able to feel his trembling hands sliding under his unmoving form, pulling him into his chest, but if things went like this, it would probably be too late. But he did wish to be held by the man one more time if this were to happen.

His head would loll against Tony's shoulder and the man would whisper his name, staring at his open eyes, searching for an nonexistent pulse, brushing hair away from his face, not caring about the blood, the sweat, the tears. He would cup his cheek, holding Peter's face in his hand, all while cradling him tightly against his chest.

That's when Tony would reach denial- yes, that fast, repeating the same two letter word over and over again with his name and nickname mixed in there. He would pull him into a hug and beg him to answer, to wrap his arms around him like the few times they had hugged in their life that they shared, but the boy would give no response. In horrible contrast, Peter's heavy head would rest on his shoulder, blood smearing the armor. Tony would clutch the back of his hair, fingers weaving between his damp curls. He'd squeeze his eyes shut to try and conceal the tears in eyes that rarely cried as he tightened his grasp around him, shaking. And then he'd scream his name one last time.

And his voice....it would break- no, it would *shatter*. Completely and utterly, never to be repaired.

Peter had heard it shatter far too many times, but it wouldn't even come close to what that would sound like.

Peter could not let that happen.

He knows he can't fight without another minute to stall and regain whatever energy he has into a last ditch attempt at an adrenaline rush. So he pulls the last card he can think of, something that had been wandering around the back of his head for a while. Turning over onto his side, shoulder covering his mouth, he whispers for Karen to make a call. And then as it rings faintly, he faces his enemy and does nothing.

Peter lets Toomes advance.

Tony screams at him and it makes him flinch. He's not giving up, Tony. He's not. Trust him. Please trust him. He wouldn't give up on him, ever.

Peter keeps full eye contact with his enemy. And still Tony's screams meet his ears because he can't look away from the man to explain through a look.

Peter doesn't move when the man reaches down and grips him by the throat, despite Tony's groggy pleads, strained curses, and shouted threats mixed with sobs. He loathes the brokenness in the man's voice.

"Bye, Peter," Toomes says, his voice breaking, a high and crazed look in his greedy wide eyes because this- this is it. He's about to squeeze his fist so that his fingers touch his palm, effectively snapping the neck of the kid that causes him so much pain. He's blocked Tony out, as has Peter he sadly admits, for the first time in his life. He can't screw this up. This is his only chance, his only way out. His eyes are on Toomes when the call finally goes through and a voice meets their ears.

Peter squeezes his eyes shut; she doesn't deserve this. Forgive me, he thinks.

"Hello? Peter- I- why are you...why?"

Peter gasps for what breath he can at the release of shock he had been holding on for. Toomes' eyes are wide. Peter, watching him carefully and taking advantage of the loosened grip, tugs at the hand very gently, his face red, mouth open slightly with pain, face covered in sweat and blood.

Toomes freezes and he straightens, his face crumpling in shock, pain, memory, horror. It's a mess of emotions and Peter recognizes every single one. The man licks his lips, finding his ruined voice, whispering, "Liz?"

There's a pause. No one can forget a father's voice. That's some scientific fact somewhere, and it's true. There's a pause of just....nothingness- Peter doesn't know how else to describe it and he hears a shaky breath and a sob from the choppy line.

"Dad?"

"Liz, I-" Toomes' voice is soft and quiet, much like when he had talked to Liz in the car ride to school. Peter hasn't heard that tone in forever. He barely recognized it, even though that was the real Toomes talking. The man's one eye was wide and full of tears, the other, the badly burned and charred skin morphing with his cheek still somehow showing emotion. Peter can't look at it.

"Dad, what's going on? You- the Raft- why are you on Peter's phone?"

"Are you gonna kill me," Peter rasped, locking eyes with a broken shell of a man, "with her on the

phone? Do you want to do it with her on the phone?" he coughs out weakly.

Toomes stares at him in shock and then flinches as his daughter's voice hits his ears, *"Kill- what? Dad! Stop! What's going on, please, just- explain what's going on-"*

"There's still good in you sir," Peter whispers, his fingers curled around the hand that is wavering around his throat. His skin is bruising and Peter's voice is harshly choked, "You did it for your family. You protected them, I believe that," he insists, gasping for breath in desperation, nodding as much as he can with the metal clenched over his neck. "Protect her now. Don't do this."

Liz is sobbing and it hurts Peter's heart- he can't imagine Toomes. She cries, *"Dad, please- I don't know what's happening- but this isn't you. Please, come home- we can figure something out- I don't know what's going on, just don't- don't do this, please. DAD!"*

Toomes is staring blankly, his eyes unfocused, tears streaming down his face, staring at the ground. There's silence except for his sobs. His shoulders rack and he shakes his head, but when he whispers, it's not what Peter expects him to say. His tone wavers as he apologizes, "Liz, I'm sorry baby, but your dad is dead."

Peter freezes in horror and immediately looks to Tony. Looking at him was a reflex, like how a kid would reach to a parent when they were in danger. His plan had failed and he had no escape. Oh God. No, no, no.

Oh *crap*. He had bet on the wrong side of the man. Maybe there was good in him, but it was wrestled and choked down by pain and anger, buried deep underground, and Peter was digging with one hand.

"Adrian-" Peter shouts desperately before the man turns to lock eyes with him and clenches his hand, a...dead look in his eyes. Peter chokes as his throat is closed again and he kicks his legs, Tony's shouting starting up in panic.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE! Toomes I'll kill you, I swear- I'll kill you!"

"What? Dad-" Liz sobs in shock, *"I'm talking to you-"*

"I'm sorry. I killed him. I said goodbye, you should too. He's gone," Toomes says numbly, his expression empty, his voice thin and emotionless. It was sincere, that was the scary part. Something had snapped, maybe it had a long time ago but something was still holding on. But that last thread had come undone, it had broken inside of him, and the man knew it. It was almost like he had prepared for this moment, as if he had been at peace with what he knew he had to do. Peter's breathing begins to speed up in panic as the man turns to him, and when he looks into his gaze- an attempt to find some humanity left...

It's an empty void of nothing but pain. The shriveled flicker of humanity had rotted away, and Peter was begging to a ghost. Without warning, Toomes' fist lands hard on his jaw, striking him across the face.

"STOP IT!" Tony screams, twisting his hand to avoid the beam, trying to burn through the metal. He shoves his head against the wall and arches his back, gritting his teeth. "STOP! PLEASE!" Tony never begged. "PLEASE!"

"Dad- STOP! Dad!"

Peter's head whips to the side and he gasps, blood dripping from his lips as he tries to take in a crucial breath, now fighting the hand around his neck. Then, with his mouth a thin line and his eyes

unblinking, as if he was just numb, Toomes plunges his hand forward in the center of Peter's chest and rips through the already weakened and chipped iron spider. The nanoparticles break apart and flake off, the call ending- sending Liz' voice spiraling into silence, mid scream. Tony's yell replaces hers.

"No-" Peter grunts, struggling for all he's worth, straining with effort.

"I understand now," Toomes says quietly and he holds Peter still, forcing the boy to look at him. He sees his eyes clear, but it's not for the right reasons. "Killing you won't solve my problems. It won't put you through pain. I killed Liz' father-"

"Toomes, you're her father-" Peter cries out before another strike lands. He's pulled harshly to his feet, his legs scrambling to lock beneath him to relieve the strain on his neck, making horrible sounds as he tries to breathe to no avail.

"I *killed* her father," Toomes says quietly, staring at Peter with anger...sadness...betrayal. "Now I'm going to kill yours." He looks over his shoulder and Peter swings his arm, clocking him weakly in the chest to get his attention.

"Don't touch him," Peter snarls dangerously, somehow finding his voice for that. "You hear me, *DONT YOU TOUCH HIM!*" His hands fall away from his neck and instead he tries to grip Toomes' arm as the man lets him go, about to break away. His foot connects with Peter's chest, square in the center and he goes flying backward with a helpless yell, tumbling head over heels.

Toomes turns on Tony who is twistedly relieved, still trying to release himself from the clasp that hasn't budged since he was trapped in the metal prison. Peter groans and gets on his elbows, shooting a web that's off centered. If this was a way out, he didn't want it. If someone had to die, let it be him.

He hears Toomes from across the room, "I'm sorry, Tony. Really, I am. None of us deserved this. But I can't help but admit that this is just a little personal."

"I decline your invite to the pity party," Tony hisses at him with disgust.

"Sarcasm won't save you now," Toomes tells him sadly. He clenches his foot down on Tony's legs and raises his wing. "I'm doing this for Peter. This will hurt him more than dying, and then he'll finally get it. He took my family. I'm taking his."

"Go to hell," Tony curses, his eyes flashing with anger.

Toomes eyes narrowed before he's suddenly blasted in the back. It's an annoying and lucky shot and he ignores it, until about twenty other bursts, all perfectly executed slam into him and for a second he can't see from all the sparks. Beams pepper him and he puts up his arm to defend himself, his feet stumbling as he loses ground, tripping over the floor.

He turns and Peter is standing weakly with his arm outstretched, the Iron Man gauntlet that Tony realizes had just been peeled away from his palm, now gleaming on his outstretched hand. His precision had been 100% accurate, even from that far away, with no targeting system. How he was standing, Toomes didn't know, but by the sound of his voice...it seemed like he was prepared to do a lot more than stand. "Get away from him," Peter threatens.

The teen doesn't wait, he webs Toomes in the chest and yanks with incredible force, sending the man stumbling past Tony before getting roundhouse kicked into the wall without warning. Peter shoots another blast that Toomes barely deflects.

The heat and the fury in the teenager's eyes goes unmatched, and he has reached a level of rage that he's never felt in his entire life. "We're finishing this. Now," he snarls.

Peter runs forward and throws a punch, ducking under a wing and getting an uppercut to the man's chin. He flips and blasts him into the wall, webbing the top of his suit and forcing him into the ground. His speed, agility, and skill has tripled, as has his pain, but he doesn't feel it. Peter takes a step back and shoots two webs, one hand over the other, driving himself forward and kicking the man in the chest. Toomes, who hasn't even had a chance to get a punch off yet, flies backward and his head hits the wall with a nauseating crack.

Peter spins, avoiding a desperate swipe before he webs the top of the nearest burned 3d screen and yanks it down, shattering it over Toomes' wing, pitching him to the side.

"You're doing this for a man who left you? Who walked out on you?" the man gasps as he hits the ground. That's when Peter knows he's winning. When he resorts to words. Maybe he can get under Peter's skin, but not right now.

"Shut up," Peter seethes dismissively. Red sliding down his vision, Peter fires a blast from the Iron Man gauntlet that Toomes has to duck from, into Peter's waiting foot. He hits the wall again and in an instant, Peter is on him, both hands on his wing.

"He left you Peter, who's to say he won't do it again?" Toomes asks desperately.

Once again, that sentence stabs him in the heart, but he doesn't feel it. Not only because he knows it's wrong, but because nothing hurts right now. He feels like he's bathing fire, or when your hand is freezing and you stick it in warm water so it tingles but doesn't hurt. He's not himself. Neither of them are. Peter's glare has no compassion, no mercy, and he snarls, "You're not touching Tony."

This was what it was about. Tony. Maybe they were weaker together, sure, but they were also stronger. The amount of anger he felt when Tony's life was threatened, the knee jerk response, the need to protect him gave him energy when he could barely stand. And now it gave him strength. He rips downward, keeping Toomes pinned with a foot to his chest. He yanks the wing clean off, the metal snapping under Peter's grip, his hands bleeding.

Toomes gasps in shock and pain, and for the first time in his life he stares at Peter with fear. The boy does not reciprocate any concern. He slams his armored fist across his face and twists behind him, kicking the back of his knee to drop him before flinging him into the wall.

The man hits the ground hard and chokes out, "He's not your real father, you know."

"Shut up."

"He never will be. He's just filling the void. He's a placeholder, you've made the great Tony Stark a placeholder."

"I said *SHUT UP!*"

"Because you can't replace that much emptiness inside you. Trust me, I would know. We aren't so different. So why are you protecting him? I told you Peter- he doesn't care about people like you and me."

"I am **NOTHING** like you," he swears. Adrenaline pumping through his veins, Peter lunges forward, blasting aside the broken wing that tries to skip forward across the room without even looking. He fires from the gauntlet, expertly using a combo of beams and webs to push the man backward before he webs his arm to the wall. Peter drives his foot forward, connecting with his

jaw before kicking him in the side.

Web ripping from the force, Toomes lets out a howl as his shoulder gets dislocated from the yank at the odd angle. Peter doesn't even flinch. In fact, he barely hears it. There's a roaring in his ears, combined with ringing. The armor from the wingsuit is scattered around him like remains of a torn up newspaper, and Toomes is a broken and bloody mess on the floor, struggling to breathe.

"You're making a mistake. He doesn't care about you. You'd die for him, the man who left you-" he explodes into a coughing fit.

Peter stares at him and almost in a trance, and once he makes sure the man is keeled over, writhing on the ground he turns around and walks for Tony, the only person he really cares about. His gaze is a horrifying mirror of what Toomes' was a minute ago. Empty and numb. Shocked but somehow calm. The man was staring at him, breathing hard and looking at him with so much emotion Peter has to avert his eyes because he's afraid of what he'll see.

"Are you okay?" he asks quietly.

"Yeah, yeah, kid- I-" Tony trails off with a gulp. Peter keeps his gaze down as Tony mumbles, "Here-" Peter kneels down at his side, heart pounding in his ribcage as he grabs the spot Tony has directed him to and tears the wing apart like it was made of paper. The man, now free, gasps and buckles over toward's the teen's chest, grasping his arms.

Peter silently helps him to his feet slowly and steadies him, allowing him to lean against the wall. He's unsure how to act, or what to say. He's still looking down and his eyes are only raised when Tony cups the side of his neck firmly, thumb on his cheek. Tony stares at him and for once, Peter doesn't let him read his gaze, although he's sure Tony still can.

Worried about what he'll think, he turns to look over his shoulder at the man who is struggling to get on his elbows and his eyes narrow. Tony gives his shoulder a squeeze and limps forward after him as he swings over and weakly drops to the ground, his feet landing softly against the charred floor.

Peter stands at Toomes' feet with a dead expression. The man coughs up blood and raises his glance to look at him, muttering, "Peter-" It means many things.

"No." In one fluid motion, lip trembling, tears welling in his eyes as they threaten to spill down his cheeks, Peter shoots a web, effectively pinning him to the ground before leveling the blaster to his heart. Toomes flinches and starts at the bright center, looking up at the teen that he doesn't recognize.

"Peter," he says again, because he's not going to plead. His indecisiveness is taking over. He's not even sure what he means by his name, he figures Peter will chose what he thinks it means.

The boy shakes his head in fury and cries out again, "*No*. You hurt him." He hurt Tony.

"Hypocrite," Toomes hisses in anger, spitting out the liquid in his mouth, his eyes flashing. "You take my entire family- you would have done the same to get revenge." In case Peter would deny it, which he wouldn't, Toomes coughs wetly and says, "Look at you, you don't even recognize yourself right now." He was right. Peter knew there were extreme lengths he would go to keep Tony safe, he just didn't know that what had happened was one of him. To be honest, it scared him, but he didn't care. Tony was alive. He did care about that. But the man that was in front of him had hurt him with a smile on his face. He needed to die. Peter had never wanted to kill someone before. he became Spiderman so that he didn't have to kill people. It was his job to save people, not the

other way around. The fact that he was questioning that...

"But my family was pure. You're risking your life for a man who would kick you to the curb just like everyone else," Toomes hissed and Tony flinched.

On instinct, the blaster heated up in correspondence to Peter's anger. "Shut up," the boy swears softly, shaking his head. There's a daring glint in his tearful eyes. "Or I'll-"

"What? Kill me?" Toomes cuts him off and internally Peter flinches. He knows him too well. He asks again. "Are you going to kill me Peter?"

Peter blinks, his arm dipping every couple of seconds, shaking in confusion. "I should," he mutters. But?

Tony's steps closer to his side now and Toomes' gaze flicks to him before back to Peter. Peter's chest tightens when he senses the man next to him, looking at him with fear. He saw the look in his eyes when he numbly crouched by his side even if he had tried not to see it. Even Tony didn't recognize him. That scared him more than anything else.

"You lost," Peter hisses out, and he slowly uncurls his fingers and lowers his arm, letting the gauntlet fall to the floor at his side. It lands with a resonating thud and all three people stare at it. "But I can't kill you," Peter whispers with a small shake of his head, "I'm better than that. Than you. I won't kill you, Toomes."

"You're weak Parker," Toomes hisses.

"It's Stark," Peter corrects firmly and immediately, gaze sparking.

The reactions of the two men are drastic contrasts but Peter only has eyes for his enemy at the moment as he pours all of the remaining hate and anger into his voice, draining himself of it. "And I beat *you*." He lets that sink in, Toomes fuming as he grinds his teeth. Peter shakes his head again and makes sure his voice doesn't shake, "But I'm not a killer."

He turns around to Tony who is standing about a foot behind him, the man's gaze searching his eyes.

And then it all happens so quickly.

Toomes lunges up, a knife from his leg strap gleaming in his hand. Peter senses it a bit too late, his body exhausted, his head spinning. His face crumples when he looks at Tony and the man's eyes widen. He grabs Peter and tugs him into his chest, whipping his hand over the kid's shoulder, a massive beam that consists of almost all the energy his suit has left, firing past Peter's head. His blaster flickers from power loss, but whatever he was aiming at was hit with the force of at least one hundred beams from the suit.

Once he hits Tony's chest with the man's arms wrapped around him, he's done. Peter collapses and Tony's knees buckle from the sudden weight as he tries to catch him. They fall to the floor together, Peter limp against his armor and Tony lets out a breath, chest falling and rising rapidly as he kicks backward, dragging Peter with him to put as much distance between him and the man who had tried to kill his kid. He exhales shakily once they're halfway across the room, tugging Peter closer with arm still level over his shoulder, aiming at a target that is no longer moving. That would never move again.

Tony gulps and makes out, "You may not be a killer, but I am. That's why you're better than me." He laughs as if there is humor to that, immediately swallowing and tightening his grip, still

scanning the room with his eyes and blaster. He would not let anyone else touch the kid after their roles were reversed for far too long. The protector became the protected, and Tony felt the need to switch back.

Tony finally lets his raised arm fall when he's satisfied this is really over and he gulps, bringing it to wrap around Peter securely, both of them sitting on their knees, Tony back on his heels, Peter slumped forward onto his chest.

"You okay?" Tony whispers, bringing a hand to clutch the back of Peter's head, his fingers curling around his hair.

Peter shakes his head violently into his shoulder, silent tears spilling down his cheeks, finding enough strength to lock his arms around the man holding him. Tony's already hugging him and he practically lifts him to pull him closer, closing the empty space. "You went all die hard on me there for a sec, you back?" Tony asked gently.

He was. The last of the red was fading away and Peter mumbled out a response, feeling childish. But he had to do it, he knew he had to. There was no way he could have even raised a finger if he hadn't let his anger take over.

As if reading his thoughts, Tony nods, assuring him, "I know."

"Is he-" Peter sobs, unwilling to look over his shoulder. His spider sense usually never allowed him to have his back to his enemy, but it wasn't going off because he knew he was safe. He simply squeezes his eyes shut and buries himself into Tony's shoulder.

"It's over, kid," Tony whispers, rubbing his back with a sigh of relief. That's his answer. His voice is soft as he repeats, "It's over. You did good."

Peter lets out a sob and goes limp in the embrace, curling against the one source of protection he's always had, he's always counted on.

"You know, what he said about me leaving-" Tony said weakly, his voice cracking.

Peter cuts him off immediately and he would have given him a sharp look if he wasn't hugging him, "No."

"I'm sorry," Tony whispers.

"Tony, stop-"

"I should have been here-"

"Dad-"

"You thought I wasn't coming- he almost killed you and I-"

"Who said I thought you weren't coming?" Peter grumbled weakly. "You always come."

"Darn right. Although I shouldn't be talking. You saved me this time round," he admits.

"You're welcome," Peter smiles.

Tony plants a solid kiss against his messy hair, holding it for a couple seconds before he tightens the hug and settles his chin down atop of Peter's head. "You did good, kid."

There's content silence. It's full of pain, yes. The lab is a burning mess around them, yes. They're both seriously injured, yes-

"Did you just call me dad?"

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

i hope yall liked that :)))) gotta love Peter being amazing and protective iron dad and just- omg im exhausted haha hopefully you can relate. Please please pleaseeee let me know what you thought in the comments :)))) I love hearing from you guys. I'd say 1-2 more chapters and then were gonna tie the knot on this amazing heck of a journey. I havent checked the word count of that chapter, i knew it was gonna be long so teehee We'll pick up right where we left off for that one and get a few more hugs in and then flufffff because we all need to recovery. Ahhhhhhhh i need coffee haha School is boring but one block left so thats chilllll, i hope you guys are doing well, staying healthy and safe and having a great week! Next chapter i will try ot get out ASAP but im diving deep into scholarships now so it may take a bit. At least i didnt end on a cliffhanger. It could be raining.

Anyway I will do my best to get back to yall <3 <3 you can rest easy now haha Thank you guys again so much for reading and for all your support. This chapter was a blast to write, I love writing fights lol and all the back and forth and LIZ!!!! (dw well get a lil bit more poor girl is traumatized OK BUT LIKE HER CHARACTER IN THE MOVIE- no one talks about how she was on the bad end of all of it i lowkey feel bad) AND more Peter with MJ and Ned and flash too maybe....redemption or more bullying....let me know.

ANYWAY I need more coffee and need to do hmwk because ur girl got like....no sleep last night teehee and i have a crap ton of hmwk so hey if youre in the same boat I FEEL YA and we will DO THIS TOGETHER YOU GOT THIS!!!! Just a daily dose of encouragement. As usualllll if life sucks i hope it gets better, just hang in there, stay tuned, stay healthy and I love you all 3000 <3 <3

I'm Your Sword and Shield

Chapter Notes

Hello you lovely lovely readersssssssssssssssssssss its hump dayyyyyy (omg remember that commercial- am i the only one who misses old commercials????!???? Im off topic)anyway....i am so so sorry. I kinda have an excuse but not rly haha This took forever i know i am so guilty of a late post. School got so so crazy and I was just so stressed, hmwk piled, tests got piled too like out of NOWHERE and it was HECTIC. But i got this out ASAP sorry it wasnt sooner :(I really hope you enjoy it tho <3 <3 its fluffy and a little angsty so its a cool combo with some nice lines that hopefully make u smirk

Life is great XD i hope you guys are doing well, please stay healthy and uhhh good luck in school because DANG ITS A RIP THIS YEAR, and i hope everything is going a okay for yall!!!!

The weather is NOICE today so thats encouraging, but it is 1:30 and I haven't had lunch or breakfast so I need to EAT XD and omg make coffee cuz i got a lot of work to do tonight hahah

BUT ANYWAY this one hurt my heart while writing, please enjoy <3 <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I-" Peter's brown furrows. What the hell had Tony just asked him? Did he call him dad? Of course he didn't call him- Peter freezes. He *did* call him dad. Oh crap- "D-did I? I don't think so-" he stutters, locking his arms so Tony can't see his face.

"I think you did," Tony grinned, ruffling his curls and hugging Peter tighter. "I'll take that over my contact being changed."

Peter snickers and lowers his head into Tony's shoulder, slumped in pain, cheek against the cool plate of armor that still remained. "Are you okay?"

"Am *I* okay?" Tony scoffed. Then he considered the question and sighed, "I'm fine, kid. I just don't want to see or listen to you in pain anymore. I've had enough of that to last me a lifetime. Please?"

Peter nodded weakly, "Yeah. Right back at you-"

There's a rumble in the hallway that accompany shouts and Peter's gaze snaps up, barely having time to catch a glimpse of a red white and blue shield before Tony tenses beneath him and spins around so he can point his palm at the make shift doorway. Its really just the crumpled-in wall but someone is on the other side, staring in panic, breathing hard.

Tony's palm heats up and Peter grabs his arm, practically wrestling it down with his remaining strength as he insists, "Tony, NO! It's Cap-it's Cap..." he trailed off in exhaustion as his stubborn adrenaline died inside him, sending him slumping back down, eyelids threatening to shut. He wished he could just lay down and fall asleep.

Steve puts up his shield hesitantly until Peter gives him a nod that he's safe and he starts forward, jumping over the rubble and shattered remains of the lab. Tony's face returns to somewhat a relaxed normal but still got his arm around Peter's shoulder as the man lowers his hand. On it's way

down he closes his fist and sticks up his middle finger, making Steve snicker as he makes his way over to them.

"You guys have a bad habit of ending up in these situations," Cap says, kneeling by their side, clasping Tony's arm. His expression is broken but relived. He's seen his friend hurt too many times, sometimes by his own doing, and to see it again just... Steve shakes his head and asks, "How many times am I gonna find you like this?"

"As many times as you get here late," Tony grumbles, making him lower his head with a sigh to cover his smirk.

Cap's gaze then switches to the motionless body across the room, something he hadn't noticed when he barged in, too worried on the two people he was next to. He grips his shield and positions it in front of Peter and Tony, asking through gritted teeth, "Is that-"

"Toomes," Tony says quietly, aware of the fact that Peter no longer flinched. "He's dead," he assured Steve who nodded slowly, not taking his eyes off the deceased enemy. He instinctively moves to block the kid's view of him, Peter's eyes burning in the opposite direction.

"Good," Steve whispers furiously, and there's a red anger in his eyes, similar to what he saw in Tony's. Peter appreciates that. Steve then turns to him and his face falls, racked by guilt, "Kid, you okay? I'm sorry- I never should have left-"

"You didn't know," Peter shook his head weakly, after giving him a sarcastic A okay sign.

Cap frowned and huffed, his fists curling as he attempts again, "But if I had stayed-"

"Steve," Peter insists, locking eyes with him and nodding. "It's not your fault."

Tony raises his eyebrows and nods, weaving to make eye contact. "He's right. It's not your fault, it's mine, but we can discuss that later-" Tony says quickly, avoiding Peter's glare. The man clears his throat, "FRIDAY, kick in the sprinkler system and contain the fires. Give me damage report as soon as you can-"

"Will do."

"The team was right behind me-" Cap says, trying to change the subject, looking over their injuries with a wince. Steve frowns and picks at the chipped armor on his shoulder as Tony swats him away with a look.

"Stop breaking my suit, star spangled idiot-" Tony snaps.

On cue, Avengers rush in, all clambering to be first. Their expressions all match, eyes wide, and their shoulders fall with relief once they see the two people still breathing in the center of the floor. There had been many scenarios running through their minds once Cap informed them all of what had happened, and they were overjoyed to see that none of them were true. But that wasn't to say the two people were unscathed.

"Look at us, together again," Tony mutters cheekily, giving them each a relived and reassuring gaze. "Hey guys, you missed the party."

Natasha is the one who sees Toomes' lifeless body on the floor and she gives Steve a questioning look. He tries to explain back with a simple gaze and she nods, directing her attention to what's more important. "Yeah, sorry, we got the memo late," she says, forcing a comforting smile.

"We had other parties," Clint groaned, cracking his back. His voice is joking but there is an underlying meaning exchanged between the two of them. "So glad you're safe Tony, would have been a shame if I got my share of the compound in your will early."

"Who says you're in my will, Barton?" Tony cracks a smile, making the man grin as he slips off his empty sack, arrows exhausted.

"You guys okay?" Nat said breathlessly, a cut trickling down the side of her face, contrasting her fiery red hair.

"Is the city safe?" Peter asked worriedly, his gaze fierce and firm.

"Did you seriously just answer a question with another question? Kid, you're not a politician," Natasha snorts, reaching down and brushing some of Peter's curls to the side where they were plastered to his forehead, frowning at the cuts and bruises. "Yes the city's fine, but *are you guys okay?*" she repeats with a tone that makes everyone listen up.

"We will be," Tony assured her, giving Rhodey a pat on his hand as the man knelt by his back and clasped his shoulder.

"Law enforcement got to Rhino, we managed to trap Shocker in an electrical loop and blow his circuits. Rhodey just hit his dude really hard," Clint summed up. "They're being transported back to the Raft under high security."

"You need med bay," Steve says firmly, bouncing on his heels in concern as he changed the subject. "You should have gone earlier- how long were you sitting here?"

"Long enough to hug my kid, Rogers," Tony snaps, shooting him a warning look.

Steve's gaze breaks into understanding and he nods before sighing, "Ok, ok. But both of you are- you're bleeding out, Tony."

"Yeah, I know that, Sherlock, thank you," the man groans. He squeezes Peter's shoulder, "How does med bay sound, kid?"

"Really, really good," Peter admits weakly, swaying slightly as he blinks in a harsh attempt to stay awake. Steve reaches and grabs Tony, helping him up, while Rhodey and Natasha ease Peter to his feet. The two instantly fall to each other, arms limply going over each other's shoulders once they're standing. The Avengers let them, knowing the two are more help to each other than any of them could be.

The room is a mess. The sprinklers start once they make their way out of the room, FRIDAY kind enough to delay them, knowing that an extra minute wouldn't salvage anything. Most of the tech is charred and ruined, and papers lay in puddles, the ink bleeding like long veins. The sparks are still brightening the room as the last of the technology dies out, glass fragments still peeling off of the lights and falling to the floor along with the water. You can't walk two feet without stepping on ceiling, which is still crumbling in small bits. Rubble is still setting in the kicked- in walls and the lights that still work flicker once every couple of minutes. The blood stains used to be more visible, but the sprinklers start washing it away, spreading it across the water, tinting it red.

Tony and Peter clear the first broken wall, the team surrounding them, some in the front and some in the back. They step through and get to the other lab, DUM-E moving forward out of caution. Tony reaches a hand out and yanks down the dunce cap, giving the smooth top of his arm a slow rub as they pass.

"Good boy," he drawls with a wink. The robot arm turns to Peter who smiles through his split lip.

They're about halfway there, Rhodey and Clint breaking off to get in contact with the rest of the Avengers and assess the damages. Clint promises to call Pepper as well, Rhodey to dial the President and inform him about the remaining traitor on the Board. They finally reach a hallway in the compound that was not affected by the blast, and Tony sucks in a much needed breath of fresh air, hearing Peter do the same. The smoke did a number on them though; no amount of normal breathing would make the thin layer of black dust coating their lungs magically go away.

Peter's been getting a little heavier against his shoulder for some time and Tony looks over and shifts him in his grasp, his ribs screaming as he does so. He forces it to only be expressed in a wince so he didn't alarm Peter. Instead he strengthened his grip on him when he sees the kid limping from his bad ankle. Tony's head is swimming and his jaw is throbbing, but manages to keep his voice level and asks, "You good?"

Peter nods groggily, muttering, "Yeah, yeah, I'm peachy. Cuts, bruises, maybe some internal bleeding- but you know what, that's *fine* because that's where the blood is *supposed* to be. So-" he breaks into a coughing fit, eyes screwing up in pain from his screaming ribs.

"No more Brooklyn 99 for you," Tony snickers.

Peter's feet stumble and the man eases him more onto his shoulder. The boy scowls, "You don't have the authority to do that."

"Uh, I beg to differ," Tony scoffs. And then, out of nowhere, Peter drops, his free hand clumsily clutching his ribs as he takes in a rattling breath.

The kid mumbles, "Just a two second break, Tony-" as his knees buckle.

"Woah, easy-" Tony would have pitched to the side if he hadn't recognized the slight release of the boy's arm against his armor. It was a slightly movement and could have meant anything but to Tony it was specific. He went down with him, slipping his arm under the kid's legs before putting a massive strain on his back and ribs to make sure he didn't hit the ground but rather landed in his arms. He eased himself up into a standing position with the help of Nat and Steve, exhaling sharply.

"I can get him if you want-" Steve offered nervously, worried for a second that both of them might go down if Tony fell, before realizing that was a silly thing to think. One of them would always remain standing for the sake of the other.

Tony shakes his head, his voice breaking with effort. "I got it, Steve. Please, just let me- I wasn't able to-before-" Tony doesn't finish but he looks at his friend with pain in his eyes. Understanding travels in the space between him and Cap nods, putting his hand on his back for support, but letting Tony carry Peter.

"I can walk," Peter groans in pain, turning into Tony's chest with a cry, his hands gripping his arms.

"I- I know you can, kid," Tony lies to make the stubborn line on Peter's forehead ease. "Just let me do this, kay?"

Peter frowns and winces, muttering, "Overprotective-" The kid's back arches and his hands clench into fists, lips pressing together with pain as he wears himself out, exhaustion starting to kick in.

Tony's jaw clenches as he moves forward, Natasha pushing open the door to the med bay. Steve

rolls the carton of supplies up and tells FRIDAY to turn on all the lights and get whatever doctor they have on stand by to the compound as fast as possible. Tony lays Peter gently down on the nearest bed and the kid sinks into the pillow which immediately gets stained with blood. Tony stands, leaning a majority of his weight on Peter's bed, gripping the boy's hand which curls around his in turn. Right there, standing over him, Tony has the worst moment of déjà vu. But at least now he had taken a beating as well, not just Peter.

There's suddenly a hand that gently tugs his arm- Natasha trying to usher him to sit down on the opposite bed Steve had rolled up but Tony violently shakes his head with a voice attempting to sound firm, "No- no. Gotta- take care of- Peter first."

"Peter's fine, Tony, I've got him," she says gently, rubbing his arm. "But he won't be fine if you bleed out," she adds more firmly, locking eyes with him. The anger she is met with his misdirected, she knows that, and she doesn't release her glare until his gaze breaks. She feels bad, but really only slightly.

Tony takes one more look at Peter who Steve has gotten the remainder of the suit off of, exposing his bloodied and bruised body, his shirt and jeans in tatters. Tony's eyes fill with tears at the reminder that he couldn't protect him, and he then nods as he squeezes Peter's hand as the boy's head nods to his chest against his will. Tony then steps out of his suit, standing down, and Natasha and Steve switch places.

Cap loops a supportive arm around him, guiding him to the opposing bed. He lowers him down on Tony's good side and immediately grabs some of the gauze, plastering it against his ribs and back where the talons had scraped him. "I've got to stop the bleeding first Tony," he says worriedly, looking over his body. "Your side will be good once I patch it up, but did he hit you in the chest or head?"

"Peter got hit in the chest," Tony says firmly, feeling his words slur as he remembered the boy's scream that he had heard across comms. It didn't even feel like a memory, it felt like real life and his eyes shot open with a strangled sound, Cap already pressing down on his shoulders, keeping him still. Tony looks to the side in fury, staring to shake, which drained his energy, but once he sees Peter's safe, he stops fighting for him. His face contorts and he gasps. "He crushed his chest, Steve-" he said brokenly, reaching for this friend's arm in a panic.

"Tony, I need you to think about *you*," Steve says firmly, assuring him, "Nat's got Peter. But you could have internal bleeding, and without a healing factor- I need you to remember any time-"

"Steve, I don't know," Tony admits quietly, digging his aching head harder into the pillow, feeling his eyes cloud with tears. He blinked them away so he could see the boy in the bed across from him. He licks his lips and croaks out, "I was watching my kid get beat to hell. I don't know," he murmurs sleepily, tears in his empty eyes that fall on his friend.

He doesn't even feel the pain anymore, and if he did, he wouldn't care. Tony's gaze is on Peter, the boy's head turned toward him, passed out. Tony mutters the kid's name as his eyelids slide shut and he feels his body sink into darkness.

8 Hours Later

Peter blinked and licked his dry lips, face contorting into an expression of pain. He squinted and opened his eyes slowly, blinking in the harsh light. The inhale of a deep breath caused a fiery pain in his ribs, that caused an immediate and sharp exhale. His hands went to clutch the point of origin

as Peter's eyes flew open, every muscle in his body tensing as his consciousness spiraled back to him. He jerked awake and looked around, taking small breaths to calm himself.

"Tony," he muttered worriedly, sitting up despite feeling like a knife was digging into his chest. Scratch that- like a hundred knives.

"Right here, kiddo."

Peter's head whipped to the side quickly, shoulders relaxing as he eased back into the pillows, knowing that the person he was looking for was there. "Hey."

"Hey," Tony agreed softly.

Peter studied his face with concerned gaze. Butterfly bandages were over the worst of the cuts, but the black eye was still there, and the split lip. There were bandages around his waist and leg, but for the most part, he looked okay.

He makes a face and announces, "Doctor Star Spangled Banner told me not to move. But I figured we could do with some food and I didn't want to be stuck in bed all day."

Peter starts to smile and then raises an eyebrow in confusion; the Avengers should have opposed this. As if reading his mind, Tony shrugged, "Either they were stupid and thought I would listen or they knew I would fight them tooth and nail for a cheeseburger-" he reaches down and produces a paper bag, taking out two sandwiches neatly wrapped.

"So I got cheeseburgers," he concludes, setting one down next to Peter who smirks.

"Thanks," Peter says quietly, moving to grab his and slowly pick at the wrapping, not really hungry at the moment, but nevertheless appreciating the gesture. "So what happened? Like before, I mean. I don't really remember getting here..." he admits slowly, racking his brain for the last thing he can recall, which is Tony scooping him up before he can hit the ground. Well he's never gonna let him live that down once this is all better.

"You passed out, some doctors came in, I passed out," he summed up, "you were treated for some internal bleeding and crushed ribs, which will heal, they assured me. They patched you up a bit more and you stayed asleep with a little help from a sedative that sped up your healing process, I cracked a few jokes and made a few amazing sarcastic comments to the team that incorrectly assumed they needed to check in on me, as if I'm not the most responsible person you've ever met and now you're awake, and feeling better?" The last statement was phrased as a question and Peter watches Tony perk up for a response.

Peter makes a face and he shrugs with an exhale, "Yeah, I guess so. A bit. I mean I'm not dying, so that's helpful."

"Yes it is," Tony nods happily.

"And you?" Peter asked, wincing as he sat up, clutching his chest.

Tony's gaze flicked to his injuries and his jaw clenched. "I'm fine."

"You don't have any super healing, Tony," Peter pointed out, trying to give evidence behind his doubtful question in defense of the man's answer.

Fine meant that he was okay. Tony was not okay. Fine meant unhurt. Tony was badly injured. Fine meant everything Tony wasn't, yet he still said it. And he always said it, Peter had gotten used to

hearing it. In fact, he considered it a red flag because 'fine' was a word Tony used much too often, that it had lost its meaning to Peter. He may be able to use it in public, or in a press conference- even to some other Avengers- but not to Peter. And yet he always said it. And the more Peter called him on it, the more genuine it sounded, which turned it into a viscous and confusing cycle that drove Peter nuts. But he did it too....so he guessed they were both guilty. The problem was Peter was convinced he was allowed to do it but Tony wasn't, even though he knew the exact thing he was getting mad at, he would turn around and do to spare Tony the pain.

Tony nodded, raising his eyebrows, "Thank you, for that amazing observation, Pete."

Peter sighed in annoyance and leaned back, closing his eyes. "You're welcome."

"I'm fine," Tony said again, firmer, as if saying it twice made the statement true.

Peter didn't even open his eyes as he whispered, "Would you tell me if you weren't?"

"No."

"Exactly."

"You know when I'm lying though," Tony added, making sure to lock gaze with him once Peter opened one, narrowing his look. Tony knew he knew. Peter knew he knew. They both knew each other like the back of their hand- that had really never changed. Maybe circumstance had occasionally clouded judgement, but they still knew. Tony leans forward as much as he can and doesn't break his stare. "Tell me if I'm lying."

Peter studies him for a couple seconds and then admits in confusion, "You're n-not-" he stammers with a knit brow, "but that doesn't make sense. You're hurt-"

"You're alive and breathing right in front of me, Pete. And you're gonna be okay. That's all I care about. So I'm fine," Tony explains, leaning back in his chair. Tony knew he could be bleeding out on floor, and he wouldn't have a problem with it, people could ruin his reputation, and he'd encourage them to, they could beat him to hell, and he'd let them, someone could attempt to break him and heck, he'd rise up to the challenge and gladly take it, they could even kill him, and he'd be more than happy to die. But for the love of God, if someone touched Peter- Tony would take anything the world threw at him with open arms if it meant that Peter could wake up the next day.

"A while ago you would have told me that's our problem," Peter says curiously. He wrung his hands and set his cheeseburger down.

Tony sighs and nods, "Yeah." Things had defiantly changed, and whether or not it was intentional, Peter had brought up a sore subject that needed to be discussed given recent events. "Peter, I-" he chews on his lip and shrugs. "I'd take a bullet for you-"

"That's not funny," Peter snaps, gaze flashing.

Tony blinks and then recognizes the irony, looking down at his chest before glancing back up, "That wasn't intentional-"

"I don't care," Peter shakes his head.

"It's an expression-"

"No-"

"Fine," Tony raises a hand in surrender and Peter relaxes, shooting him a look. He rubs a hand over his face and says quietly, "Kid, if it was saving you or the world, I'd chose you. There's no contest. And if that's a bad thing, then I don't want to do what's right. And if that does make us codependent, so be it. I think we've known that for a while. People will use that against us, of course they will. Because let's face it, Pete..." He laughs but there's no humor, just a hint of love, relief and a pinch of terror.

"You're my weak spot. Always have been," he admits with a smile, spreading his hands. Peter blushes and Tony still ducks to find his gaze, "And I'm yours." The boy straightens, confirming his thoughts.

Tony's tone sobers, gaining emotion and fierceness as it shakes. "And yeah, that's gonna cause some complications. But you won't watch me walk out the door again, I promise. Whatever fight we have, we will fix it. Because that's what we do. Whatever curve ball that gets thrown at us, we will face it together. I know I've apologized for leaving more than you want, but it will never be enough for me. That is my greatest regret, Peter. I just...wanted to tell you that."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" Peter smirked to hide his appreciation of something that was still healing between them. It couldn't be ignored, but it was already overruled.

Tony chuckled, "I- I don't know what it's supposed to make you feel. I know you've moved past it, but you have to respect the fact that I probably never will." He paused. "I know how I feel now though," he decided, spreading his hands. "Proud."

Peter nearly snorted and he scoffed out, "Why?"

"Why?" Tony countered with a signature raised eyebrow. "In that room- Pete, you were stronger than I've ever seen you-"

"I collapsed the minute we walked out," Peter grumbled, clear shame smeared across his face.

"I needed to pull my weight," Tony gave him a small smile and reached to playfully rub the boy's knee. "The least I could do was carry you during the home stretch. You did your part. It was time for me to do mine," he tells him firmly.

Then he looks down at his feet. "But I didn't do my job. I left you behind and that was the reason for this whole mess. What happened to you was because I wasn't there. Again. And I know you wanted to stay, I know why you did it." Peter looked up in shock and Tony nodded.

"You did it because you knew that if we both were in the city fighting, I'd spend more time watching out for you then I did worried about-" he trailed off and ran his hand through his hair. "And you were right. I would have. But I didn't want to leave you alone either. And then...well we know how that turned out. Because I wasn't there to protect you-" he holds up his hand weakly because Peter is bursting to interject. "Pete, let me finish, please," he begs.

His voice is so broken that Peter instantly quiets and nods slowly.

"Either way...there was no outcome where you didn't get hurt. And that *shouldn't* happen," he says quietly, shaking his head, speaking through gritted teeth and a firm stare at the floor. His legs are shaking as his clasped hands lay on each of his knees. "I hate it. I should be able to protect you, Peter. It's my job. It's always been my job to look out for you. To take care of you. To keep you safe. And sometimes I can't. And I'm sorry. That's the bottom line."

"You don't need to apologize for that-" Peter whispers in confusion.

"No, no, I do. You are my responsibility. If something happens to you, that's on me," he says firmly. "And Peter- you're- if I lost you...kid-" Tony's eyes flash and he lowers his head in defeat and shakes it, hands reaching to rub his hands across his hair as he takes deep breaths. "No," he makes out, his voice cracking. "No."

"Tony, you're all I have," Peter responds softly and the man looks up with a broken expression at Peter's confession. His gaze reflects his pain and Peter's pain- their pain- everything they've been through over the past couple months. Peter purses his lips, "I lost my parents. I lost Ben. Now I lost May. But I still have you. If I lose you, I fall apart. Don't think I don't understand. But you can't apologize when you're the one thing that keeps me going."

Tony looks up at him and Peter bites his cheek, letting out a light laugh, "We keep reach other standing, hell, we keep each other human. I wouldn't be who I am today without you. If you think you've failed somehow-"

"I'm not about to take credit for what an amazing kid you are," he says with a smile. He shrugs with a small smirk, "Don't get me wrong, you've had your fair share of screwing the pooch moments, but so have I." The man shakes his head, wringing his trembling hands as he tries for a smile and rubs his hand over his face, "And I think I win in terms of best screw ups. Some dad I am, letting all this happen to you-"

"You didn't let it happen." Peter scrunches up his nose and curls the sheet in his fist, taking a shuddery breath. "Tony, do you remember the first time you saved me?"

Tony looks up and frowns, subtly brushing a hand across his face to clear it of tears, "Uh- at the airport?"

"2010."

Tony's brow knits and he stutters, "But I- I didn't know you then-"

"It was a Hammer Drone. I broke away from May because I thought I could help. There was a crowd, I was small, I could easily slip through. They were all running away and I- I knew I couldn't. I thought I had to face it, and...save the day, or something like that. I had one of those Iron Man light up helmets on, with a plastic blaster. I had begged May for it for weeks until she caved," he said quietly, a ghost of a smile on the kid's face. The pain of losing his aunt was still there, and it tortured Tony- he couldn't begin to imagine how Peter felt. The boy took a shaky breath, screwing his eyes shut and clearing his throat to try and swallow the sob that was lodged there.

"One landed by a group of people and I didn't move an inch as it walked right up to me, thinking i could take it down I guess-" he shook his head, embarrassed at his child-like innocence. He shakes his head and scoffs, "Like the blaster could somehow fire itself. And then a blaster did fire, but it wasn't mine. I looked up and saw you next to me, and you hit the drone straight in the chest. I jumped back, trying to figure out what happened, and you turned to me and said 'Nice work, kid.' And then you flew away. And that was...the first thing you ever said to me, and the first time you saved my life."

"That was you?" Tony said gently, a smile growing on his face as he remembered the boy in a white shirt and dark pants, curly hair sticky out from behind the mask. "That idiotic brave little kid was you? With the- with the curls- and the planted feet- I told Rhodey about that..." the man trails off with a proud look in his eyes, because Peter never ceased to amaze him.

Peter looked up at him and smirked, "Yeah. My point is...you've always saved me. You've been the one constant in my life that when it comes down to it, I know you'll be there. Because you're

always there. And I think we're learning we can't protect each other. Because in our line of work...that's kind of hard. But Tony, there has not been a moment where you haven't done everything you could to make sure I was okay. When I couldn't count on anyone, in the end, I could always count on you."

"It's my job," Tony says quietly, looking down. "You're my kid. I've got to look out for you." His voice breaks at the end, and it clenches Peter's heart.

Peter swallowed and nodded, blinking away tears, some slipping out the corners of his eyes. "Yeah."

There's a lot more they want to say but don't know how. So for a second they sit there in comfortable silence.

Tony then clears his throat and smooths down his shirt. He scratches his greying hair and suggests, "You want to get some sleep?" His voice is quiet, his gaze concerned as he reaches and rubs Peter's knee, the scratchy blanket under his palm.

"Not really," Peter admits, shifting in his bed with a wince, hand jerking for his chest before settling down once the pain subsided. His eyes burned with embarrassment and he wouldn't dare look at Tony who flinched at the boy's pain.

"Can you?" the man insists quietly, and when the teen finally meets his gaze he gives him a pleading stare. Tony reaches and ruffles the kid's curls, pushing his head gently, "I can see your eye bags from here."

Peter self consciously rubs his knuckles under his eyes and ducks away from his hand, grumbling, "I don't call you out for your bags, old man."

"For the record, you escalated to insults, Underoos," Tony announces. "And I'm not old."

"What's all that grey stuff in your hair then?" Peter asks innocently.

Tony's gaze jerks up, his eyes widening, "You little-"

"I'm just making an observation."

"I think I pull it off."

"So you admit you have grey hair?" Peter grins.

"Don't twist my words. Just because you're my actual son now doesn't mean you can emotionally abuse me. What if my feelings are legitimately hurt, huh? I bet then you'll feel bad," Tony says with a teasing smile, letting out a chuckle as Peter laughs. The sound echoes throughout the room and they give each other confused and happy grins, wondering how they can always find humor in even the darkest times.

"I think you'll live." Peter rolls his eyes and gets comfortable, well, as comfortable as he can. He settles into the blankets and pillows and squeezes his eyes shut, turning towards Tony and whispering, "You're not going on any conference or some crap this week right?"

Tony was surprised he even asked that, but he understood the reason. Peter had gotten used to being alone. That was Tony's fault, at least some of it. He had been stripped of his family, his friends, forced to go through life solo, to face trauma solo, and now he was admitting that he couldn't get through this one by himself. He was scared for what was to come, heck, he was even

scared to go to sleep.

He needed Tony. And Tony needed him just as much.

"Yeah, because that's exactly what I want to do, go to a convention or meeting with class A stupid people who give me migraines and make me question my will to live, while my actual will to live is bored in the medbay," he says teasingly. Peter gives him a small smile, realizing what he had just slipped in there.

"No," Tony agrees, answering his question firmly, that he was not leaving. The man sighs, moving his chair closer and resting his forearms on the bed, laying his chin down on top of them as he locks eyes with his kid. "Not a chance. I'm taking some much needed, much deserved, time off."

"So, at what point did you decide to turn this into a Meg Ryan movie," Peter opens one eye and Tony reaches forward and messes with his curls, gently turning his face into the pillow, feeling Peter smile beneath his palm.

Peter's gaze narrows at Tony's face which is resting on the bed and he reaches forward once Tony pulls his hand away and pokes him lightly in the head, messing up a section of his brown hair. "Grey," he sniffs matter-of-factly.

"Brownish grey," Tony corrects with a scoff.

"Grey," Peter repeats, closing his eyes.

"Go to sleep, brat," Tony snaps in annoyance, but there's an underlying love.

"Mkay," Peter says sleepily, his forehead creased with pain and anxiety. It doesn't fade, just lessens as Peter's head sinks to the pillow, bangs falling and covering his eyes. Tony is about to lean back in his chair when he sees the boy's hand clenched into a shaking fist, knuckles white. He purses his lips and reaches sideways silently, eyes on the teen to make sure he doesn't wake up. Tony pries his shaking hand open, flinching at the nail marks already on Peter's palm.

He slips his palm in there instead and Peter's fist curls again, Tony wincing only slightly from the grip as Peter tightens into a fist again. It takes a while, but eventually he falls asleep, head landing on the soft hospital bed, inches from Peter's side.

It's one day later when the first serious nightmare starts. Tony thinks it's because Peter's brain was too exhausted to register the trauma immediately- after everything the kid had been through. Some of the team thought it would have taken longer, but Tony realizes that Peter's never gotten a break. First it was their fight, then Damian, then Ross, then Toomes- the boy was convinced he was in some downward spiral and his mind wouldn't let him rest because who's to say he could. He hadn't had a week of nothing going wrong in months.

At first, Tony didn't even hear Peter's screams because he thought they were in his head. He hadn't gotten enough sleep to know how messed up that was. At that moment, he was in the lab next to the med bay, his head rising and falling sleepily against his arms, jerking up in a panic to stay awake before sinking back down against his will. His muscles would spaz and his chest would tighten and then he'd try and relax again. Peter's screams had echoed in his ear every night, but they had started to happen when he was awake.

They'd sound, blood curling and deafening and Tony would flinch in his sleep or suck in a breath regardless if he was conscious. But he'd learn to conceal it with a wince and a slight twist of his

head as a shudder ran down his spine for when it happened during conversation. So when he first heard it, he tried to swallow down the lump in his throat as tears met his eyes. He curled his arms tighter and buried his head into them, trying to block out the sound with eyes shut tight.

After about the third one, he realized that it wasn't in his head. Tony shot up and spun in his chair, nearly falling out of it as he turned in the direction of the medbay. Peter had slept through most of last night, and he assured Tony that he was okay if the man wanted to go to the lab for a bit to distract himself. Tony hadn't really been sleeping, and Peter knew it was because he was too busy keeping an eye on him.

Now he was sprinting for the door with a yell of, "PETER!"

Another scream, this one ripped from the boy's throat, morphing into a choked and shuddery sob by the end that sent adrenaline and fury coursing through Tony's veins, a feeling he hated, a feeling that sent fear rippling through his entire body.

One of the repaired blasters shot across the room, forming around Tony's waiting palm as he kicked the door open and lunged, growling out of habit, "Get away from him you son of a-" Tony leveled his arm at whatever was attacking his kid with fire in his eyes, the door swinging on its creaky hinges as his gaze of dismay fell on Peter.

The kid was asleep, twisting and turning in the sheets that were choking his legs and restraining him to the bed. Tony, breathing hard, eyes wide with panic, clumsily lowered his arm and surged forward, hands grabbing Peter's shoulders firmly, wincing at the strained muscles beneath his palms.

"Kid, wake up-" he says quietly.

"Don't- don't-" Peter moaned, twisting his head into the pillow as tears streamed down his cheeks.

Tony could barely find the strength to plead, "Peter, wake up, kiddo, please-"

Peter curled his fist and punched, barely missing Tony's jaw, a hit that would have sent him to the floor. Tony ducked in shock, tightening his grip, his voice failing him. The teen arched his back and thrashed, nearly tipping the bed that Tony was trying to steady. His screams were the worst thing Tony has ever heard, racked with sobs, belted from his throat, scratchy and hoarse.

"Wait- WAIT! WAIT! No- TONY!"

"Pete!" Tony raised his voice, finally managing to trap the boy's arms to his chest as he writhed underneath him, eyes still squeezed shut.

"Stop it- please stop-" Peter sobbed, straining against his grip, shaking his head, hair matted with sweat, plastered to his forehead. The sheets were cold and wet, twisted and tied, and his chest was rising and falling rapidly, legs kicking desperately every which way.

"Peter it's not real, listen to me," Tony's voice breaks and he grits his teeth, sobering his voice to keep it from cracking as he urges, "I know you can hear me, kid. You know it's not real. It's different. It feels different."

"T-ony-" Peter pleaded, whispering his name like he was holding onto it for dear life.

"Yeah, that's it, kiddo. You know it's not real. Just trust me, Peter. Trust me," Tony insists. "You need to wake up."

The boy lets out a strangled scream that's a half sob as he grips Tony's arms, curling his shirt in his fists, gasping for breath, face knit in concentration.

"PETE!" Tony finally has no other choice but to yell.

Peter sucks in a massive breath, his eyes shooting open and he finds Tony's gaze, his look just completely and utterly shattering. Tony wraps his arms around him immediately, Peter on his side. The boy is trying to figure out where he is, kicking away the sheets that are wrapped around his legs as Tony eases him off the bed, the teen practically lunging for Tony's embrace once he realizes he's in the lab and whatever he was seeing wasn't real. The man catches him staggering, both of them collapsing to the floor, Peter's feet sliding against the floor as he tries to force them back to get away from...something. Tony didn't know what Peter was seeing, but it wasn't good; the bed had nearly tipped over as the teen launches himself off.

Tony's got an arm wrapped under one of his arms and around his chest, Peter's back and side up against him, his other hand on his head, claspings it tightly. "You're okay, you're okay," he whispered harshly, taking a shuddery breath as tears spilled over Peter's cheeks, the boy trying to breathe correctly and failing, slumping against Tony's chest, hands gripping the arms holding him securely, legs still pushing against the ground in a desperate back pedal as he hyperventilates.

"Ahhh- ahhh," Peter exhales in pain, buckling forward, turning and lowering his face into Tony's chest who slides his hand to cup his cheek and thumb his curls. The sound is heartbreaking and Tony clenched his teeth so hard they start to ache.

"It's okay. I've gotcha, kid. I'm right here," Tony assures him, tugging him closer with the arm around his chest, Peter bringing up his legs as if he's worried something is going to grab them. He's practically in a ball as Tony holds him against his chest and the man lowers his cheek to rest on Peter's head, effectively shielding him, allowing him to take shelter in his embrace. Peter's shaking worse than he probably ever has, his trembling hands gripping Tony's sleeve and arm tightly.

"I-" Peter gasps. "Ahh- T'ny-"

"You're safe, Pete. I've got you, kiddo. I've got ya. Breathe," Tony murmurs into his curls, before looking up and biting his lip at the awful sounds of pain coming from the teenager in his arms. "It's okay-"

"It's not o-okay-" Peter insists with a gulping sob. Tony nods but then the boy gasps out, "T-toomes. *Toomes*."

"He's dead, kid," Tony says quietly.

"How do you *know*? You don't *know*. He's gonna come back- he's gonna-" Peter trails off, already pushing away from Tony against his will as if somehow that will keep the man safe from him. A constant reminder that there will always be an instinct to protect the other person, even if it means distancing themselves. But Tony wouldn't let him pull away, that's what made all the difference. Eventually Peter accepted it and slumped *toward* him, not away. He was still speaking firmly, shaking his head, "He's gonna come back, Tony, and h-he he's-"

The man tightens his grip on him for a quick second before twisting around to meet Peter's eyes, reaching down and cupping the teen's cheek with his hand before he says firmly. "Look at me- Peter, Peter, look at me. He's not coming back."

"We- we thought he was gone years ago- when he went to jail- then at the base- with D-Damian- we thought he was dead then too-" Peter spluttered.

Tony's heart felt like it was being twisted in a fist. He cursed that the boy had to suffer through this, and Peter's fears were partially justified, but not completely. "I killed him this time, Pete. He went for you and I shot him dead. I would not have allowed him to live, you hear me? If anyone, *anyone* goes for you, they're dead," Tony hisses, the anger in the flash of his eyes alerting Peter but getting his point across. "He went for you," Tony said quietly through his teeth. "He's dead. I promise."

"I-" Peter cries.

"Do you trust me?" Tony asks firmly, staring him straight in the eyes.

"Y-yes but-" Peter says weakly, tears streaming down his cheeks as he shakes his head because it had been *so real*.

"He's dead," Tony insists, not letting him finish.

"B-but-" Peter retorts fiercely.

"Do you trust me?" Tony asks again, forcing that trust be the only thing it came down to. He had left fire almost all of the energy in his suit. A tenth of that shock would kill a man immediately, Toomes had been running on a shell of a body and adrenaline from the minute he got up with that knife. He was dead. But he needed Peter to know that. In a world where the boy was deprived of closure, Tony wanted to give him some, even if it was just a sliver.

"Y-yes," Peter repeats, pursing his lips and letting out an awful sound that he swallows, shoulders racking with silent sobs, eyes screwed up as he shakes his head and lowers his chin to his chest and reached up with both his hands to press his palms against his temples.

"He can't hurt you anymore. No one can. Not while I'm here. You got that, kid?" Tony whispers, carding a hand through the kid's messy hair before letting it rest on his shoulder, which he squeezed lightly, an act of support. A physical touch that was grounding, that proved to Peter that this, *this*, was real.

"Y-yeah," the teen says softly, in a voice that he should never have to use, rocking slowly as he tried to steady his breathing, a rattling deep in his lungs.

Tony slips his hand around the back of Peter's downward casted head and pulls him gently forward, the boy's forehead hitting Tony's chest, shoulder's relaxing. He has one hand resting on his messy mop of curls, the other on his back.

It takes about five minutes for Peter to finally get to a point where he can breathe normally, and the hot tears have stopped stinging his eyes. He raises his head slightly and presses his palms to the ground as he sits up, arms trembling. He runs a hand through his hair and subtly wipes his eyes, avoiding Tony's gaze.

"You good?" Tony asked quietly.

"No," Peter admits with a sigh. "But yeah. Did I- did I wake you up- I'm sorry-" The first conscious thought he has is about Tony's well being. Isn't that telling.

Tony shakes his head, "No, I was in the lab. I just ran in when you started screaming."

Peter flinches and curses, "I was screaming? I thought that was just..." His cheeks burn with shame and he presses a palm against his pounding head, trying to blink away the bright spots clouding his vision. His gaze falls on the blaster that was on the floor and he frowns, "You brought the-"

"I thought you...were in trouble. I was having a not so good dream myself, and...well, I just thought..." Tony trails off. "I had to yell at you to get you to wake up, you were pretty deep in there, kid." The fact that Peter didn't even wake up with physical contact or is initial shout scared him. The nightmare had such a strong hold on him...Tony didn't even want to think about what it was about.

Peter scratched the back of his neck and shifted uncomfortably. "Yeah....well..."

"You want to talk about it?" he asked slowly.

Peter shakes his head, "No. No, not really."

"Okay," Tony backs down respectfully. "Can I help at all?" he suggests awkwardly, unsure what to say at this point.

Peter gives him a look and smirks, "Yeah, I'll just snuggle up on your shoulder, we'll laugh, cry, heck, maybe even break out a chick flick."

"It's a crime to offer help now," Tony nods sarcastically, rolling his eyes as he eases himself backward into a more comfortable sitting position on the floor. "Got it."

"I'm fine, Tony," Peter assures him.

"No, you're not, and you don't need to be," Tony counters with a shake of his head. "What you went through, what you've been through, all of your life- Peter, no one deserves that. If I could take your pain, I would, but I can't. So I do the next best thing, which I happen to suck at and that's having a counseling session aka a conversation, which, by the way, doesn't work if you don't talk."

"I don't need a counseling session," Peter grumbles in defiance, crossing his arms and looking away.

"You don't *want* one," Tony corrects gently. "But you've learned this really bad habit from some idiot, who may or may not be sitting right in front of you," he sighs, "of bottling it all up and dealing with it by yourself."

"And what's wrong with that?" Peter sniffs.

Tony snorts, "You have the Avengers as your support group, kid. Not many people can say that. And when we ask you if you're okay, we want to know if you're okay, me especially. Don't I get that as sort of the father package deal? I think I'm entitled." Peter snorts and looks down but doesn't answer and Tony presses forward. "We don't want to hear 'you're fine' with some convincing smile that's the exact opposite of what you're feeling," Tony says firmly. "They've been worried about you, you know."

Peter hadn't been very talkative with the few people that came in to check on them. The only exception was Pepper, who had come and taken over Tony's shift when he had to get X-rayed again. He did it while Peter was sleeping, and Pepper had sat by his bedside, reading a book. She had told Tony after that the boy had woken up once, and she had consoled him, calming him down as he rambled off about what he felt, and slowly easing him back to sleep. Pepper had walked out in shock because through his noises of pain and his contorted face while sleeping, he had mumbled out 'thanks mom'. But besides that instance, he had been very quiet about the whole situation over the past day.

And the Avengers had noticed. Tony had talked with them about it, explaining that they needed time, because the boy had been more closed off than ever, changing the subject if they started

asking about pain level, and making a joke or sprouting a sarcastic one liner the minute someone sat down and clasped their hands for a talk.

He was becoming Tony. It was blatant, and it was understandable, since the two were almost exactly alike. But he was becoming Tony.

And Tony hated it.

"And so have I," he finished slowly. "I know it's only been a day, but I know you. And I know if we let this, it's gonna get worse not better with time. So you gotta promise me that you're gonna be more transparent," Tony said, spreading his hands.

"No," Peter shakes his head.

Tony blinks, "Excuse me?"

"I said no," Peter repeated fiercely. "It's how I've been dealing with pain all my life. If I stop now, I'll fall apart. If I don't get through this the way I get through things, whether that be healthy or not, then I won't get through it at all. You have to trust me on this one, Tony. If I don't talk about it, it's because I'll break if I do." He eases back at the look on Tony's face and mumbles in partial surrender, "I will let you know if it gets bad, and you can try and talk me through my problems, but you can't fix them. But what I don't get is talking about it won't bring May back, talking about it wouldn't have made it so that you never got kidnapped by Damian, and talking about it wouldn't have stopped Toomes from coming back, so what's the point in talking about it?" He lowers his voice, realized that in his frustration he had brought up some buried anger and redirected it at the person who least deserved it.

"Because you promised me that I wouldn't have to see you in pain anymore," Tony answered softly, sending Peter's gaze snapping up. "And when you keep this in....Peter you're just piling up the pain behind the dam, and it's gonna break, whether you want to accept that or not. So I get it if you don't want me to help build it, but you better not push me away when that water comes flooding in."

"There's a difference between not letting you in on occasion and not wanting to ever talk about it-" Peter starts in a low and stubborn grumble.

"No, Pete, there's not. There may be a slight one now? But eventually there won't be," Tony shakes his head with a dangerous look.

"Why does this bother you so much?" Peter demands, tears of frustration building as he speaks in exasperation. "I'm dealing with it! Just like you want! I get you're concerned, but what is it that scares you so much about me not-"

"Because you're *becoming me*," Tony blurts out, matching his volume level and similarly backing down. Peter stops in shock, narrowing his eyes in confusion and Tony runs a hand over his face. "Because I'm watching you become *me* and there's nothing I can do to stop it. And I never want you to- I want you to be better. Don't deal with stuff like I do. We've talked about this, and I get it, you think I'm cool," he drawls sarcastically, rubbing his chin and shrugging. "I appreciate that. I love being called cool, it's great for my ego, but in this instance, you are too much of me. And I'm asking you to succeed where I failed. I'm begging you to see that."

Peter lets that sink in and Tony allows time for that. The boy recognizes the pain in the eyes of the man across from him, and the truth in his tone. He chews on his bottom lip, staring at him intently before finally sighing, "Okay." He looked down in shame before raising his gaze and making eye

contact with Tony who looked more hopeful than he had possibly ever seen him.

The boy nods and he whispers, "I'm sorry. If it gets bad I'll let you know."

Tony's shoulders relax and he takes a shuddery breath, trying to act normal when in reality, this was a massive victory for him. Peter smirked and injected humor in the situation to save Tony the embarrassment of recovery, "But don't expect a detailed summary every day."

"This is coming from the kid who left 60 voicemails on my phone a day about old ladies with churros and bike thieves? That kind of detailed summary?" Tony said with a smirk.

Peter groaned and rubbed his eye, shaking his head, "I never should have told you that."

Tony chuckles, and they lapse into silence again. This time there's less tension and more resolve. Tony stares at the kid who takes a deep breath, about as calm as he's gonna get in this current situation. He notices Peter's hand has stopped shaking. That's a good sign.

"Ice cream and Star Wars," he suddenly blurts out. Man, they haven't done that in forever. Last time was....what....a week before their massive fight. Peter looks up in shock and happiness that he tries to mask. Tony grins, "What do you say?"

A small smile spreads onto the teen's lips and he nods, getting to his feet along with Tony, "That sounds good."

"Ok, then. Ice cream and blankets. The living room ones are in the wash and Clint is a polar bear. He was watching Netflix last night so it's an arctic," Tony says with a sigh and Peter laughs, nodding.

"I got some extra in my room," Peter nods, pointing in the direction as they walk up the steps of the med bay. Tony's hand hovers by Peter's elbow, making sure he doesn't fall and the boy sighs, turning to him. "I'm not glass, Tony. You're like...waiting for me to shatter."

"I'm just...being...cautious, Mr. Incredible," Tony says defensively, waving him off and starting down the hallway after giving him a quick hair ruffle. "Fine, fine-" Tony watches him carefully out of the corner of his eye to make sure Peter can walk okay, reminding him as he walks backwards, "Be careful."

Peter smirks and nods, slowing when a voice calls for him. "Hey which one? Prequels or Originals or new? What?"

"My favorite," Peter says over his shoulder.

"Got it."

Walking isn't the problem. Peter's ribs have always been the part of his body that have constantly gotten cracked, busted, shattered- you name it. He was used to that. It was mostly just exhaustion. The minute he left Tony's side, he was left looking over his shoulder, even in his own home as he made his way to his room.

The limp was small, Peter could hide that easily, but since no one was around, he allowed it. His head was throbbing and the lump hadn't left his throat, nor had the nausea, which was probably why he didn't want the cheeseburger. The knot in his stomach was slowly unraveling, but not fast enough.

The nightmare had been awful, but seeing Tony's face when he opened his eyes, worried and terrified, was almost worse. Peter had tried to break out of it as soon as he could, but he could barely even control the rising and falling of his own chest until he had five minutes to calm down. The amount of fear that rippled through his body paralyzed him- while doing the opposite. Peter's conscious was trapped, forcefully held down while he panicked and let his feelings take over- resulting in the sporadic lunge to get away from his nightmare. Embarrassment still heated in his chest and his cheeks stung with a pink tint even recalling what had happened.

He rubs a hand over his face and sighs, blinking harshly to recenter himself as he made it to his room with a grateful breath of relief, leaning against the doorway. He clumsily opened the knob and stepped through, pushing his hand against the light, squinting from the bulb's glare that shed a soft glow that looked a million times brighter than it was. His stomach flopped and Peter pressed his lips together, squeezing the knob tightly but holding back, afraid he'd dent it. He made his way over to the closet but never got there. Instead he felt himself walking sideways, the world spinning and he reached and grabbed the chair to steady himself.

Panic attack- anxiety- trauma- he didn't know what it was, but it rushed at him and Peter's other hand whipped up to his head as he held his breath, squeezing his eyes shut. He tried to make it stop, he wanted it to stop, but it wouldn't. He couldn't make it stop-

In a fit of anger, Peter ignored the sharp pain in his ribs as he slammed his hand down on the desk drawer that was extended outward. It broke off and landed in a pile of broken wood on the ground, the contents of the drawer shattering. And as it fell, so did Peter, one hand gripping his side, other palm flat against the ground.

You're fine, he told himself. Why was he like this- he felt childish. He told himself that somehow, how he didn't know, he needed to be okay with what happened. He needed to get past it. Doing this was weak. But he had told Tony not to worry, and he had gone off by himself, and now when he needed Tony most, he was unknowingly downstairs.

Through his gasping for breath, his gaze fell on something barely visible beneath one of his palms. He gulped and pushed himself backward, slumping down into a sitting position, leaning defeated against the desk and he weakly and sloppily grasped in the pile of the drawer's contents. He emerged with a small stack of pictures, the first one being the one he took from his apartment, him and May, smiling as they each held a handle of the Decathlon trophy for freshman year.

That one still hurt, but the anger was gone. He brushed his thumb over it and moved it to the side, the next picture taken in the lab, he and Tony working on one of his suits. The blaster was sparking and you could see the charred marks on the wall from when the previous one exploded. Tony's hand was on Peter's shoulder, the boy leaning forward to look at the panel, caught off guard by whoever took the shot. There was a happy smile on his face, back when things were simpler.

Peter swallowed and pushed that one into his lap where he had let the picture with May drop. The Avengers were scattered around the living room, Natasha holding a football that they liked to toss around during movie and game nights. The game of Risk was on the center table, Steve, Rhodey, Sam, and Bucky facing each other with killer expressions. Tony was on the couch, absentmindedly firing his blaster at Clint who was making a game out of ducking, Wanda giving small flick of her fingers to dissolve the blasts. Vision was watching carefully in the corner next to Bruce, analyzing every move- Peter remembered he announced that a vase was going to be broken in 5 minutes, and sure enough it was.

This was his family. Peter felt something drop off his cheek and he wiped his face, surprised to feel it wet. He shuffled through the pictures, seeing one of him, Ned, and MJ at a field trip, the girl's

arms crossed, smirking at Peter and Ned who were making some stupid face. There were a couple more of the Avengers, them around a table with pancakes and 6 pitches of syrup.

And then the last one, he and Tony both slumped in their chairs, with pencils tucked behind their ears, unknowingly in the exact same position, gnawing on their lip at the table, feet up on other chairs. Peter had been working on homework, Tony on a new protocol of the suit. He remembers Pepper snapping that picture, both he and Tony looking up at her light laugh.

Peter ran out of photos and they fell softly into his lap. He gathered them up in his hands, able to stand and he slipped them into his pocket after looking at them fondly for another couple seconds. He tested out his weight on his ankle and started for the closet, opening the doors and grabbing the two extra blankets he kept in there, shifting their slight weight to his other arm where his ribs were slightly better.

He moved the door open with his foot and slipped out of his room. The walk back to the living room was long, but Peter barely recognized it, comforted by the pictures in his jean pocket that stuck through the fabric a small bit with each stride. Passing the lab, he pulled them carefully out and set them on the table, planting a kiss on his fingers and tapping it on the picture of his aunt. *I miss you, May.*

Then he hefted the blankets onto his shoulder and walked back up the couple steps, making his way into the living room where Tony met him with two bowls, cold spoons sticking out of them. Peter set down the blankets and when Tony held out the bowl for him, Peter swerved, wrapping his arms tightly around his waist in a hug.

"What are you-" Tony trails off. "Oh," he says simply, his tone radiating content confusion. The man couldn't exactly hug back because his hands were full, and he was definitely shocked. He stuttered, "That wasn't a hug, Peter, I was just giving you your ice cream."

Peter laughed, muffled in Tony's sweatshirt as the man chuckled, lowering his chin against Peter's head and planting a kiss on his hair. "Can I ask what this is for?"

"Nope," Peter shakes his head. Somehow Tony knows that he's not being sarcastic, but that he can't decide if there is a reason, and if there is, it's not one he can explain in words.

"Ah, gotcha," Tony says, waiting a second for Peter to release his hug, which he doesn't. "Oh my God, take your bowl, you frickin koala. My hands are cold."

"Oh my gosh, how will you survive?" Peter drawled, pulling away and grabbing the bowl, taking a bite before he even sat down on the couch, Tony taking his seat next to him and pressing play on the remote.

"Did you hit your head or something? Are you dying? You better not be dying," Tony scowls.

"No," Peter sniffs, eating another mouthful of ice cream, and shushing Tony, pointing at the screen with his spoon since the title credits were already rolling after the climactic chord. "Movie's starting. No more questions. Pretend you're in the theater."

"But you always talk in the theater," Tony points out, getting a light kick from Peter. "Ow! I see you're better."

"Shut up!" Peter scoffs. "I'm gonna milk it, just like you."

"You know this movie line for line anyway," Tony sighs in annoyance. "I could put it on silent and you'd still be watching it in your head."

"So? It's called being a nerd," Peter says, reaching forward and snagging a spoonful of Tony's ice cream, the man rolling his eyes in exasperation.

A couple minutes later, Peter yawns against his will and Tony looks over, seeing the flickering fear in his eyes about falling back asleep. He nudges Peter in the shoulder, figuring the boy can live with him talking over Darth Vader. "If you fall asleep on me, I'll be pissed."

"Relax princess," Peter huffs. "I'm a big boy, I can stay awake."

Turns out, he couldn't. They had just landed in the trash compactor when Peter's eyes started to close. The trash compactor scene was one of Peter's favorites, so Tony knew the boy was exhausted, so much so that it was overriding his fear of falling asleep.

Tony was well aware of the boy nodding off, in fact, he had barely been watching the movie except when Peter looked over in excitement, sprouting a line in sync with the character or blurting out a behind the scenes fact. He had been glancing at him out of the corner of his eye, making sure that his kid wasn't in pain, and that a small smile of familiarity was on his face, a common expression when they had one of these ice cream and Star Wars movie nights. And it had been far too long.

So when Peter's eyes did close, Tony moved instantly, catching his head on his shoulder and easing him down into a comfortable position. The boy's head dipped and Tony reached very slowly to pull the blanket up to Peter's chin, ruffling his hair out of habit.

Surprisingly enough, Peter didn't wake up for the rest of the movie. He would tense up and his chest would rise and fall faster at certain points, and that's when Tony pulled him closer, carding his fingers through his hair until he calmed down.

He told himself he would stay up for the rest of the movie, and possibly the whole night, because Peter needed him, but even asleep Peter gave a small smile the minute he thought that, because the boy knew he needed him just as much. So as the credits rolled, Tony allowed his chin to drop, his eyes to close, and he lowered his head onto Peter's and fell asleep.

And for five hours straight, neither had nightmares, which was saying a lot.

Chapter End Notes

Tadaaaaaaaa well <3 <3 happiness I did promise....

I have notes for either 1 or 2 more chapters.....i dont know which one yet.....so next one very well may be (is that the right grammar lol) the last chapter. ik ik ik i am so so sad this amazing fic is coming to an end ive had an absolute blast writing it and yall have been amazing the support and comments and just omg you guys rock thank you so so much for the bottom of my heart. If yall want 2 more chapters fill the comments with things you want to see and if i can slip them in and weave them in i will im sorry if i cant tho

SO yes!!!! Take care, good luck in life, love yourself because every single one of you are amazing, drink coffee, get sleep (idk what that is anymore haha) anddddd yeah!! I am not gonna give an EST for next chapter because im pretty sure that somehow my life is getting crazier this next week so i am so so so so SO sorry if its a long wait i am def gonna be keeping yall on the edge of your seats :((((i will get it out ASAP tho i promise

Thank you guys again, i rly rly hoped you liked that chapter, please give me ur thoughts below i love you hear from you!! I felt weird about this chapter ngl and some of you know this so sorry if this wasnt one of the best, I was def off my game but i can promise next chapter and if there is one after that, they will not come out until they are TOP TOP NOTCH

So thank you alllll for all of your support, stay healthy and stay tuned and as always because DUH

I love you 3000 <3 <3

Need To Breathe

Chapter Summary

Oh yeah so like idk i guess i havent read enough....idk what word to use....gross? fanfic? but Peter throws up just FYI its not a spoiler but i just wanted to give a heads up if people get sick reading about someone getting sick. I tried not to make it too icky. XD

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely lovely readers <3 <3

First off thank you for sticking with this. It rly means a lot and as were coming down on the home stretch, this IS the second to last chapter, Im happy to say I'm back in the groove.

Life was AWFUL and HECTIC last week and i got zero sleep and had a lot of hmwk and no time to write so I do apologize :((((BUT this chapter I feel much much better about, i personally had a lot of fun writing it and I really do hope you enjoy! Thank you for all of your comments, constructive criticism- never be afraid to give that, and just all the hype and amazing things yall have been saying. It keeps me going and is super encouraging so thank you so so much <3

You can tell I'm tired because THERES NO CAPITAL LETTERS OR WORDS WHERE I DO THISSSSSSSSSSS

fake it till ya make it is my motto- omg im tony stark

ANYWAY

I hope YALLs lives are going great, hang in there, ik its tough and school sucks but it will get easier just give it time. Please take care of urselves idk who needs to hear that but yeah, if youre reading this ur amazing and if anyone says otherwise, direct them to me <3 <3

Enjoy thissssss: we finally get in contact w Liz, Flash and Peter are lab partners, MJ and Peter are adorable, and we get another Avengers breakfast and the humor is back baby XD not in that order at all Im realizing.

ANYWHO- yeah i do be changing it up its who instead of way HA I hope you like it, ill shut up now cuz i talk WAY TOO MUCH :)))) Enjoy the chapter!! I'll get sentimental and sad in the end notes :(

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter woke up with a small pain in his neck, the blanket wrapped warmly around him, his legs curled up. He was leaning to the right, and- oh. His head was in the crook of Tony's shoulder, and he felt a hand in his hair. He remembered the rub of his curls from the man slumped against him, actually sleeping. That was the only reason Peter didn't move originally. Tony's eyes were actually closed, the worry lines on his face had eased, and there was a small glimpse of a smile on his face. His chest was breathing deeply- he was actually asleep.

But as the lip curled on Peter's face in shock, he flexed his shoulder and he saw the man's eyes

open, starting up, the blanket falling off his chest. Peter internally cursed and turned his head, squeezing his eyes shut, hoping Tony would just fall back asleep once he thought Peter was-

A hand ruffled his curls and gently turned his head and the man looked down at him with a raised eyebrow, "I know you're awake, idiot."

Peter opened one eye guiltily, sitting up. "Sorry."

"For falling asleep on my shoulder?" Tony asked innocently.

"To be fair, you fell asleep too," Peter grumbled, rubbing his bed head and twisting around so his back was against the end of the couch, inhaling sharply as he pressed a hand to his ribs, well aware of Tony's concerned stare.

"Yeah, yeah," Tony smiled, giving his knee a light pat as the man raised himself from the couch and looked at the time which read 9:20. "Wow. I haven't gotten that much sleep in...." It was longer than he thought. Much, much longer. And in shock, Tony trailed off and didn't finish.

Peter pulled the blanket up to his chin and Tony noticed, rotating his shoulder as he called, "Hey FRIDAY, put the thermostat up a few degrees?"

"Got it, boss. The Avengers are waiting for you in the main dining hall." Oh that's right, the rest of the team had gotten back late last night. *"They're starting breakfast in ten minutes."*

Tony raised a curious eyebrow and tossed his head in the general direction, asking, "You want food, kid?"

Peter nodded slowly. "Yeah." He slid off the couch and got up, Tony putting out his arm on instinct, clasping Peter's good shoulder as they walked. The man yawned, starting down the hallway with him and Peter chewed thoughtfully on his lip before he mumbled, "Are they mad at me?"

Tony looked over at him in surprise and nearly chuckled at the outrageous statement, "What? Pete, why would they be mad at you?"

"Because I've been pushing them away for the past day and a half. I've been shutting them out. I've been shutting you and Pepper out. I haven't talked to MJ or Ned either. Maybe they're-" his train of thought spiraled and Peter's tone came out more miserably and much quieter than he was expecting.

"Are *you* mad at me?"

Silence.

"Peter, no one is mad at you," Tony assured him gently, locking eyes with the teen under his wing. "This is a marathon, not a sprint. It's been a day. The team knows you need your space, they're just gonna be a little cautious around you, share what you want, they'll accept it. Everyone just wants to do what they can to make sure you're okay. That's all."

Peter nodded and his eyes moved back and forth, a clear sign he was hiding something. Tony sighed and squeezed his shoulder without looking. "Spill."

"I called Liz."

Tony's walk slowed, and he almost tripped over his feet. He instinctively brought Peter closer and

asked, "Yesterday?"

"She didn't answer. So I left a message. I guess she heard what happened on the news. *She's* mad at me, I know *she* is," he mumbled in sadness, and Tony didn't have the strength to lie to him. The way he emphasized those words told Tony that he couldn't try to contradict him, because Peter knew he was right.

"But I can't blame her," the boy continues, shaking his head, leaning slightly on Tony. "What I did...it was awful. I was desperate. I didn't have anything else up my sleeve, I needed time, I needed shock value, I used her. I *used her*."

"You saved my life?" Tony said, as if that made it better. His life wasn't worth that to him. But to Peter it was. And that's why the boy did it. He bent his morals for him, he did something he was not proud of, that he hated himself for, even, to save Tony. And the man cursed himself for not seeing this sooner. He realized when the boy called her, too. It was yesterday, when Peter said it was okay if he stepped out for a bit- no, not said, insisted. He didn't want Tony there for the phone call the boy made, the girl not even answering. But why would she answer?

"I- I don't know what to do. Should I- should I call again? Should I wait? I tried to explain but I- I couldn't," he cries, his voice breaking as he hangs his head. "I can't explain what I did."

"We're not perfect Peter," Tony whispers, unsure of the words coming out of his mouth.

"Sometimes..." It will make him feel better. "Sometimes we have to do some messed up things to protect the people we love." He wasn't giving Peter an excuse, but they had previously established the lengths they would go to keep each other safe, even if it dipped into questionable waters.

Peter nodded and rubbed his nose, and Tony could practically see the wall form in front of him as the kid backed down from the subject and subtly wiped his eyes, cracking all too familiar smile as he forced the pain deep down inside of his chest. "I didn't say I love you."

"This is true. I think you meant it though. You always say sappy stuff like that," Tony shrugged with a smirk, playing along only because he knew this is what the kid needed. It was what he needed when put in a similar situation. An out using humor.

"I do not!" Peter gasped, their conversation put on hold as they rounded the corner, a bunch of hopeful expressions meeting them as they crossed into the kitchen.

"God, you're always arguing," Natasha rolled her eyes after greeting them with a smile and a wink, sitting down at the table.

"Flattered, Romanoff, but it's Tony," the man corrected sarcastically. Natasha gave a light laugh. "Long time no see, guys. You missed a lot."

Tony and Peter were greeted by the additional Avengers that had gotten back, and he let the teen out from under his arm. The kid walked forward weakly, enveloped by a hug by Pepper who was out of her seat in an instant, asking him about his pain levels. Tony saw Clint out of the corner of his eye reach for the thermostat and Tony barked, "Barton! Nope."

"It's a sauna in here," the man whined.

"You'll live, I promise. Back away from the thermostat," Tony warned dangerously and the man groaned, putting his hands up in surrender and walking back to his seat.

"Tony, syrup," Steve pointed to the cabinet Tony was standing next to.

"Good morning Capsicle, nice to see you to. How am I? Great, thanks for asking. Once again, yeah, I'm injured but sure, I'll get your precious syrup. Do we need any chairs brought over while I'm at it?" Tony drawled in annoyance, recalling a previous moment in this same room.

"No, we're good," Rhodey called with a grin and Tony gave him a death glare.

Peter was already sitting in his spot, his arm subconsciously stretched into Tony's place, saving it. The man smiled as he set the syrup down, seeing Wanda placing two plates down for them, piled with pancakes. He gave her a smile and she returned it, taking her spot next to Vision and grabbing a wet napkin out of the air before it could hit Sam. She tossed it to Nat who then threw it backwards into the trash without even looking, Bucky and Clint groaning in protest from their spots at the table.

"Clint, it seems you have some competition," Vision said with a small smirk, noting Natasha's throwing accuracy.

The woman bit her lip and made a face, leaning back in her chair confidently, "Clint, I don't think you're needed on this team anymore. We're done pretending, right guys?"

Clint screws up his face and sniffs, "Hey, at some point, it's- it's not funny anymore." But the smile that can't help but break out shows he's kidding and Cap laughs, shoving him lightly in the shoulder as he passes him the syrup.

Peter's already smiling when Tony finally takes a seat, and it's genuine this time, which puts a smile on Tony's face as well. The boy takes a pancake from his plate and puts it on Tony's and the man narrows his eyes, Peter looking at him innocently before it turns into a mischievous grin. Tony sighs and accepts it, rewarded by the happy smirk from the teen next to him.

"How was Star Wars, guys?" Pepper asks knowingly, leaning forward to look at the two of them.

Both Peter and Tony look at each other, mentally having a conversation on how to respond. Tony sets down his fork and nods, "Good, as always."

"I quoted every line and he got pissed off," Peter adds flawlessly.

Tony nods and then admits, "Never gets old watching Luke blow up the Death Star."

"Was that before or after you fell asleep?" Steve asked innocently.

Peter grabbed his cup of apple juice someone had gotten him, he didn't know who, and chugged it so he didn't have to answer the question. Tony scowled and rolled his eyes, Peter smiling into his cup because of his reaction.

Pepper chuckled and gave Tony a rub on the back, "We're just teasing. We were glad you were able to get some sleep."

Tony turned to her sarcastically, "Thank you, that means a lot." He changes the subject as he starts cutting his pancakes without Peter telling him to. "Update on the chaotic world that is somehow still turning with me not at full strength?"

"Mayfield's in federal prison, his hearing is in a week," Steve said, folding his arms across his chest before nodding his head to the side, "Rhodey's gonna make sure he tanks and ends up going away for life. Raft is filled, and they've doubled security. The new director finally doubled down and installed some of your suggested protocols."

"Ross 2.0?" Tony said hopefully.

"Ross 2.0," Steve agreed, and everyone raised their glasses and clumsily clinked them together.

"Meeting went well," Wanda assured him. "The new Board of Directors respects our conditions and won't infringe upon anything we've already put forward. Sorry we missed all the fun," he smiled.

"We were gonna head back but by the time we got the call, Clint checked in with us and said that it had already boiled over," Bruce said with a frown.

"Yeah, this was a limited time only deal," Tony winked. "FRIDAY how's the lab looking by the way?"

"Repairs are ongoing sir. It should be fully operational in one week. The extent of the damage on the center lobby will take as long as a month. But the rest of the wing is minimal."

Tony nods and leans back in his chair, stretching and cursing randomly, "Frickin blows up my lobby..."

"We need more syrup," Sam waved his hand from his side of the table. Wanda raised the strawberry flavored bottle from their side and he made a face, specifying, "Real syrup."

"You have legs," Bucky snorted, motioning for the kitchen.

"And you have one arm, no one's judging you," Sam grumbled. Gasps and hoots echoed around the table that turned into alarmed shouts as a scrappy fist fight broke out on that end of the table, Clint choking on his pancake as he started laughing.

"Just don't kill each other," Natasha offered absentmindedly, sharing a look with Wanda and Pepper, possibly the only mature people at the table.

"Maiming or seriously injuring is okay," Steve sighed, moving his chair back, putting his plate in his lap to keep it from getting knocked.

Clint snorted as he took a big gulp of his orange juice "Okay, Dobby."

"I didn't know you were a Potter Head?" Bruce marveled to both Cap and Hawkeye.

Clint sniffed, "I'm not uncultured."

"It was on my list," Steve said defensively.

Amidst all this, syrup was still needed, and in a sudden realization that his knees were locking up, Peter realized this would be a great time to loosen them without anyone noticing. "I got syrup," he announced, pushing his plate forward and chair back so he could stand. But they locked early when he wanted to turn and his waist spun, his knee did not. Peter felt a sharp pain in his leg as his joint bent and his legs gave out beneath him.

Peter caught himself on the table with a sharp exhale, and even if he hadn't, Tony's arm was gripping his, helping him stay standing. He had heard the man harshly call his name once he caught him, and the teen realized he too had let out a sound involuntary- it was a clear sound of pain. The arguments and fist fights quieted and a light pink flushed his cheeks as Peter looked away in embarrassment.

"Peter, you okay?" Steve asked slowly.

Peter nodded vigorously, gently pulling his arm out of Tony's grasp as he forced a smile and loosened his knees, "Yeah, yeah, I'm-" Peter stopped once he saw their expressions. A few looked down, like they had expected that response and wanted to respect it. Others winced, giving a shake of their head, knowing full well that the smile was fake and not appreciating being left in the dark. Others gave him a look of compassion and understanding that Peter found comforting and he hated at the exact same time.

He sighed and wrung his hands, leaving one to sit on top of the spinning chair- Tony insisted they replace every single chair in the house because they were the best thing possible for one's back. He rubbed the soft material under his thumb.

"No?" he finally admitted weakly, almost like it was a question. He had no answer. But he was okay with that. Because his answer was around the room in every single face staring back at him. He bit his lip and said, "I'm not okay. I'm trying to force myself to be okay, and it's- it's not really working out for me. I've been...trying to keep how I'm doing from you guys, and I'm sorry, I guess I thought I was protecting you in some way, because I didn't want you to be hurt because of me. You guys are everything I have left. You're my family. And I just didn't want to screw it up."

"You can't screw us up more than we're already screwed up," Clint said with a smirk, raising his glass. "Heck, at one point Natasha had to slam my head really hard into a railing because I had glowing eyes and was killing people. Everybody's got issues."

"In this house, we announce our problems to try and make people feel better," Sam rolls his eyes with a smirk and Peter appreciated his gesture.

"Although on the upside, my eyes were seriously blue. I'll admit, I was more attractive than I already am," Clint puts up his hands and Bucky hits him in the back of the head. The man curses and spins, spluttering, "What?"

"The moral of this self centered story is that you've got us, kid," Natasha says, her voice drawing his attention back to the front. Her piercing eyes lock on him and she nods in understanding, "And I know you don't like to ask for help because you're usually the one that gives it. And I know it's overwhelming having us try and shove all this knowledge at you to keep you from making the mistakes we did, but it's because we care about you."

"Each one of us knows what you went through, because we've gone through something like that ourselves," Bucky mumbled.

"Just make sure you talk to us about them a bit, kid. We're here for you," Steve said firmly, winking and giving him a firm and encouraging nod.

Vision, who was closest to the kitchen, gave Peter a nod and a smile as he got up from the table and went to go get the syrup, saving the kid the trouble.

"Yeah, yeah, I know," Peter agreed with a nod. "I- I will. T-thanks."

"Okay, sappy talk over," Tony declared, shoving a pancake in his mouth and gulping down his coffee. "We could literally have our own reality show at this point. You know what, maybe we're in the wrong field of work."

Peter rolled his eyes as he settled back down in his seat, seeing the proud grin from the man next to him as he dunked his pancake in the pool of gooey liquid and took a bite, chewing a mouthful. "I

know one thing, I'm screwed when I go back to school. If they don't let me graduate, I swear to God. I told Ned not to do my homework this time, but he's doing it anyway."

There were a couple chuckles and Tony ruffled his hair, "You'll be fine. Worst comes to worse, we can home school you! Steve and Bucky practically are history, Natasha and Wanda can teach you Russian, Rhodey...you just look like an English teacher, I don't know why. Pepper's got business and I've got...everything else- math, science, physics, chemistry, engineering, et cetera. Bruce and Vision are subs. This could honestly be perfect, why are we even Avengers we can have our own reality TV show while teaching the youth of America."

"What do I teach?" Clint raised his hand.

"PE," Tony decided on.

"The hell?" the man protests.

"You look like a dodgeball coach. You know with the headband?" Tony demonstrates. Clint gives him a fake laugh and a glare. Tony grins, "Yeah, you and Sam can partner up. You teach the PE, Sam teaches the health class."

"Absolutely not," Sam shakes his head.

"We should start a school," Tony spreads his hands like he had just solved world peace, which he kind of had, but that wasn't the point Peter was trying to make. The man whistles and says thoughtfully, "We'd make millions, are you kidding me?"

Peter's eyes shoot open wide and he looks at him in disbelief. "Yeah," Peter laughs nervously. "Great idea- you're not actually considering this, are you?"

"Of course not," Steve chuckled lightly, giving him a confident shake of his head.

"Yes," Tony said at the same time.

Peter sighed and took another bite of his pancakes and while Tony was arguing with Steve, he took a gulp from his coffee. He slowly zoned out and looked around the table at the people he was proud to call family. He would never grow tired of sitting at this table, and he realized how lucky he was to have a life like this. Even if there were some complications.

Most teenagers had to worry about acne.

He had to worry about nightmares and panic attacks caused by the violence between him and some of the greatest psychos of all time.

Some people paint.

It was Saturday. If he felt like going back to school Monday, he would. Tony would say it's too soon, Peter knew that. But similar to last time, he never wanted to take more time off than he needed. He spent his entire life trying to be normal, and he wouldn't stop now. Peter did want to get back to school, so he guessed he was just trying to convince himself he was already fine. Which he wasn't.

But it seemed to be working, because he found he could snap out of it when he forced himself to. If he was put in a room with people he needed to believe he was fine, he could flick it off and on like a switch. It was scary, knowing that he could do that sometimes without even thinking. What if he lied to Tony, or faked it around him without knowing? He promised he wouldn't, and that he would

keep him posted, but now maybe it would be an accident. Maybe something he said could slip past Tony and he wouldn't know.

Tony turned back to him and narrowed his eyes, "You drank my coffee, didn't you?"

Peter gave him a guilty smile. Nothing slipped past him.

It was 3 am when his phone started buzzing. Peter was in his room, the light on his desk flipped on, shedding a soft glow on the books he had piled, his chem homework long finished. He should go to bed, he knew that; he had decided to go to school tomorrow- well, now today. But he just couldn't sleep. Peter wanted to go down to the lab but he promised Tony he would try and get some sleep. He had tried. For about three hours he lay awake under his covers, shifting positions, eyes wide open, thoughts pounding against the sides of his head.

He finally got up and crossed the room, working on his web shooter at his desk, slumped in his chair. He had music going at a very low volume and his eyes were narrowed in concentration. When his phone buzzed he sat up straighter and fumbled for it, leaning backwards to reach it and flipping it over.

Liz

Peter froze. He almost forgot he had to click the 'answer' button but he eventually shoved his thumb against it and plastered it to his ear, his next breath getting caught in his throat. His legs were tense and his screwdriver he had been clasping when working on the panel to his web shooter fell limply into his lap. Peter licked his lips and croaked out, "Liz?"

"I saw what happened on the news. But they aren't naming names or locations or any specifics for that matter, for once." The girl's voice was furious, hurt, and confused. There was a twinge of sadness at the end which meant she had purposefully covered it up.

"After he went to the Raft, I thought it was over. And then I heard about the prison break and I- I thought I saw him one day, a little while ago, in the dark, by the lamp post on my street. I didn't know what to think, and then it seemed like everything was going back to normal. And then I look at my phone and it has your name, of all names, on it. And when I picked it up-" she paused and cried out, *"why would you call me?"*

Peter cursed and squeezed his eyes shut, letting his head fall into his hand, "I'm sorry. Liz- I- I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have- there's nothing I can-" he trails off and gasps out. "I left you a million messages-"

"I didn't listen to any of them," she snaps. *"I don't know what you want me to say to you."*

"You don't have to say anything," Peter said hurriedly, rubbing his hair, knee bouncing on the ground.

"I do though. Because I think I finally figured it out," Liz says, her voice dropping lowly to a mumble. She sounded older, like she was forced to grow up too fast. It was like when you see the eyes of someone who has been through trauma...that was the equivalent of her tone. *"When you left my party, when you weren't in the elevator with us in DC and weren't at Decathlon either, when you left Homecoming...why you were so scared when you saw my dad. Why it was you on the phone with him. What was the Stark Internship, Peter?"*

Peter felt his eyes well with tears and he pursed his lips, not wanting to respond. If he hadn't been

already sitting down, he would have dropped to his knees.

He finally breathed out, "Liz-"

That was answer enough it seemed like.

The girl sucked in a breath as she realized her inference had hit the nail on the coffin, driving it deep into the wood, splinters flying. And then there was a shaky exhale. Peter curled his hand into a fist and pressed it against his mouth, feeling a tear slide down his cheek.

"I don't know what else to say except I'm sorry," he admitted, his voice quiet.

"You say that a lot. What are you sorry for this time?" the girl chuckled without humor, and Peter bit his lip hard at her choice of words. *"Calling me while my father said he was going to kill people and deny that he was my dad? Or killing him?"*

Peter was about to contradict that as he straightened in shock, but then he realized the blame would then be placed on someone else, someone he cared about, someone who didn't deserve it. And he understood why she thought that; all the pieces fit. Better to have the blame on himself. He bit his lip even harder until he tasted blood and whispered brokenly, "I- he was gonna-"

"I know."

"I can't- I don't have an excuse. I was- I can't-" God, he couldn't even finish a sentence.

"Last year you asked if there was anything you could do to help. Now there is. Just- never call me again?" Liz's voice broke and he could hear her tears from across the line, Peter's heart clenched tightly. It wasn't an angry request, it was desperation, and that made it hurt more. *"I can't move on from this if I keep getting messages dripping with your guilty conscience."*

Peter nodded, fist still pressed hard against his mouth. He stuttered weakly, "O-okay."

"Peter?" Liz asked quietly.

"Yeah," he croaked, clearing his throat and wiping his eyes, leg still trembling underneath his elbow.

"Is he dead?"

Peter stopped.

He blinked.

He tripped over his words even trying to ask her to repeat the question but she interrupted him, *"Is he dead? I need to know."*

There was a lump in Peter's throat, choking the life out of him, making his eyes sting and his lungs burn, but he still found the strength to push through one three letter word, "Yes."

"Good."

Peter didn't know what to expect her answer to be, but that wasn't one that ran through his brain a millisecond earlier. It was said without hesitation too. Peter's jaw clenched and he sat straighter eyes widening. Then his face crumpled at her next sentence. Out of all of them, this one held the most emotions and Liz practically sobbed while saying it, making tears spill out of Peter's eyes as he looked down in defeat, the drops falling to the carpet.

"Because the man you just killed was not my father. He said- it- himself. My father died a long time ago."

Peter was trembling and he spoke harshly, "Liz, can I try to explain-"

"No. You can't."

She didn't mean she didn't want him to, she meant there was no explanation, and Peter, with his head in his hands, agreed. Even if there was, he wouldn't be able to put it to words. And it would sound so selfish. He used her to get under Toomes skin. The minute he knew Tony was in danger he threw all moral principles away and dialed his last resort, something he knew would maybe, just maybe, create a dent in the monster *he* had created. It hasn't even worked. It was all for nothing. Liz would hate him even more if she knew that. That phone call was just fuel to the Vulture's fire- it was what sent him into the deep end where no one could reach him, heck, the phone call was practically Peter ripping away the life preserver. And in that moment, he didn't even care about the girl who had it first.

"And I really- Peter, I really don't want you to," she cried out, cutting herself off with tears. Peter screwed his eyes shut, shaking his head as he sucked in a breath and held it, his stomach tossing inside of him so much so that he stared at the trash can if he needed to use it, guilt soaking into his veins, head pounding from the force he was grinding his teeth to hold back a sob.

"Liz-" he said again, barely able to even get that gasp out. Just her name. That was it. Even he didn't know what he meant by it. He hoped she did.

"Bye Peter. I hope that you figured out whatever was going on with you," she said softly.

CLICK

Peter let the phone fall from his ear and he just...let it slide to his lap and then off the chair. It thudded onto the carpet and he put his head in his hands, palms pressing against his temples as he tried to steady his breathing. His hands were shaking and Peter stood up, and then sat back down, hands curling into a fist as he punched mid air, the chair creaking beneath him.

Tears in his eyes, he stood, scrambling for the door and he rushed down the hallway, the walls his support, knowing Tony would be in the lab on his floor just in case he got up. Peter didn't breathe the entire time he staggered down the hall, he just kept his feet moving forward in desperation to get where he needed to go. Tears were streaming down his cheeks and his palms were bleeding from how hard he was clenching his fist.

He reached for the doorway like it was the most wonderful thing in the world and nearly fell down the steps to the lab.

Tony had his back to him, facing a repulsor, bent down with sparks flying. The man looked at the clock to his left, still facing away from Pete and he frowned, "I thought you promised you would get some sleep?"

Peter didn't answer he just numbly stepped down to the floor and stood there in defeat, still holding his breath as tears trickled over his hot cheeks, face white with a little green, shaking hands clutching his stomach.

"Pete?" Tony called, before he saw the man straighten and turn, moving his glasses up to rest on top of his head, eyes alert. They focus with his and Peter gulps, clutching his stomach harder with a pleading gaze. The look was strikingly similar to that night on the roof, when he had collapsed and

admitted it had finally hurt. He was asking for him to catch him.

Tony moves immediately as Peter coughs once. He reaches, grabbing the trash can and crossing the room in seconds, barely getting it underneath him in time for Peter to get sick. His knees hit the floor hard as Tony tried his best to ease him down at the awkward angle he reached for him in. Peter barely felt the pain of the hard tile, a chill going down his back. The boy was sobbing as he retched, emptying his stomach. The entire time, Tony kept a hand on his back, Peter hugging the bin against his chest. He heard Tony murmuring encouragement in his ear over the roaring in his head and the awful sounds he was making. The man's voice it grounded him, kept him focused whenever he did open his eyes which were usually squeezed shut as he heaved and then ducked forward again.

He didn't really remember stopping, or if he said anything to explain himself, all he remembers is the feeling of just...pain in his stomach, wishing he could just take a deep breath as he hurled, his throat raw and burning. He finally does breathe, the hand on his back helping him inhale slowly once the sobs fade and his shoulder stop shaking. Tony's touch is gentle as he pries Peter's white knuckles from the bin he's been clutching that Peter sloppily pushes away. Tony slips some paper towels into his hands and brushes his hand under Peter's curls, feeling his hot forehead. The boy leans forward, eyes slipping closed, allowing Tony to prop him up.

A second later, Tony glances backward at the couch and looks back at him in question. Peter nods weakly. Tony eases him to his feet and Peter presses his lips together as tight as he can, feeling another wave coming as his stomach churns. But then he's already down on the couch and Tony's on one knee in front of him, Peter's forehead slumped on his shoulder as he sucks in a breath through clenched teeth, praying he doesn't throw up again.

Tony's got an unmoving hand on his head and he stays there for a minute, before he starts to stand, clasping Peter's shoulder and asking, "You gonna be okay for a couple seconds?"

Peter nods miserably as he slumps backward onto the couch. Tony gives him a firm nod as he takes the bucket into the bathroom and Peter can hear the water running. He focuses on breathing and trying to kill his nausea. Eventually, he does, and Tony arrives just in time, slipping the now cleaned bin by the couch but out of sight, handing him a glass of water.

"Sips," Tony instructs, pulling up a chair across from him, sinking down in it and watching Peter warily as the boy slowly drinks from his glass, knee shaking.

Peter sets it down on the floor and runs a hand over his face, wiping the sweat away and taking a deep breath, scratching at his damp curls.

"Feel better?" the man asks gently. Peter nods, then pauses, and shakes his head honestly. He meets his eyes and winces. Somehow, Tony knows this is more than a nightmare. Somehow he does. Peter wants to tell him, he really wants to get this off his chest, but he can't open his mouth to say it. He can't. And it kills him. It hurts so much it makes his eyes sting and his throat close up. Then Tony's calming voice breaks through the wall that is being stacked high and he says, "You don't need to tell me, kiddo. I know."

Before Peter met Tony, he would have said there is no way you can have a conversation with someone without talking, or even give them details on a random subject, let alone one as specific as a name. But somehow, when Peter looked into Tony's eyes the man asked, *Liz?*

Peter looked down and that was Tony's answer. The boy pressed a fist to his mouth and then flex his hand, wincing as it trembled. "I hurt her. Too- too many times."

"It wasn't your fault," Tony tells him, looking at him with pained eyes.

His voice hurts, his throat burning with every whisper as he insists, "I should have found another way. I'm supposed to *save* people Tony...not kill them."

"You didn't kill Toomes," Tony snapped instantly. Peter winces at his carelessness. Tony had. Tony had been the one to blast him in the chest, not Peter. He had done it for Peter.

"Not this time. But I was the reason he went off the deep end. I killed him years ago. The real Toomes," Peter whispered. That probably didn't make sense, but Peter somehow felt responsible. Same way he felt responsible when Toomes had lifted off with those bombs and Peter had saved his life. He hadn't saved him. He had condemned him. He had driven him mad.

"You can't save everyone, Peter," Tony told him plainly. It was the first time he had to tell him that, and Peter could tell Tony hated it. Peter hated it to.

He looked up with hot tears in his eyes and he feverishly shook his head, "I can. I should. There was another way-" There was always another way. He became Spiderman so that he could be the other way, so that he could save people's lives and take the heat when needed to make a difference in this world, to use his powers for good, to sacrifice himself for the sake of others-

"What was it?" Tony demanded so furiously that Peter jumped, his gaze snapping up. "Letting him kill you?" the man scoffed in disbelief. "Because that's what he would have done. If you hadn't turned on that switch and you hadn't called Liz, he would have killed you, Peter."

Peter shrugged, "I never said it was a good way."

Silence.

He wouldn't dare look at the man who's face crumpled like something inside him had just shattered. Tony's voice was laced with calm but it trembled with anger, "He would have killed you in front of me- was that one of the options running through your brain?" he shouted. "Was that one of your last resorts- did you even stop and think about what that would do to the people who care about you? The people in your life?"

"YES!" Peter yelled, and this time it was Tony who jumped, looking at him in confusion. Peter swallowed down the taste of pennies and begged his stomach to hold because the lump in his throat was building as he hissed out, "Yes, I did, I went through it, I watched it happen in my head and I knew I couldn't do it. Because I knew that if the situation was reversed and you had died in front of me, I would-" he can't finish so he bites his lip.

Tony's eyes are wide and confused and he settles back into his chair, hand still against his leg for once, not drumming his fingers.

Peter's voice came out low and it broke more times than he was willing to admit, "But I hurt someone, Tony. I hurt someone who didn't deserve to be hurt, I've hurt her too many times and she had done nothing wrong! I have done a *million things* wrong. I deserve the pain, not her, me." He jammed a finger into his chest, breathing hard.

"Maya Hansen."

Peter looked up and frowned, "W-who?"

"Someone I couldn't save. She was...involved with the wrong people, people who wanted to kill me, take over the War on Terror," he waved his hand dismissively. "But she came around. She was

going to help me. And then she was shot, killed, feet in front of me, doing the right thing. And I was helpless to stop it. She wasn't the best person, but she was smart, and in the end she was ready to sacrifice herself to fix what she had done, and she had a conscience. She didn't deserve to die, but I couldn't save her."

Peter straightened in shock and mumbled, "Oh."

The man nodded and ran a hand over his face. "Peter, I'm gonna be honest with you," Tony says slowly, clasping his hands together and shaking his head. "This? This is going to happen. Again. And again. And again. Because the world is a messed up place and you are just one person and you are far from perfect. You're not even out of high school. But turning this on yourself, and taking the blame for every single failure, every single thing that could have gone differently, it will ruin you. It ruined me for a while and you dragged me out of that hole. So it's my turn to return the favor because I'm not about to stand by and let that happen."

Peter felt his stomach flip inside him but his shoulders relaxed by the sincerity in the man's words. He hung his head and muttered, "Thanks, I guess. I mean, it feels like crap."

"Welcome to being a hero," Tony says with a smile, ruffling his hair.

Peter looks up weakly and swallows down a gross taste, screwing up his nose before drawling, "So am I an Avenger now?"

"Basically," Tony nods, playing along to his transition into humor.

"That means yes," Peter continues, rubbing his knees and shifting his position.

"Kind of doesn't," Tony contradicts and Peter smirks. They lapse into silence but it's not really silence between the two of them. It never is. And to Peter there's a roar over their conversation that he's drowning in, trying to strain his ears to hear over it.

Tony says the last sentence as a whisper, knowing Peter will hear it better, knowing it will ground him and bring him back to reality, "It gets easier." Peter blinks, wiping a tear on his cheek before he glances up and sees Tony holding out a screwdriver for him.

"It always helps me if i fix things," the man says with a shrug. "What do you say, kid?"

Peter stared at the screwdriver for a second before he reached out slowly grabbed it, fingers curling around the handle.

Peter ended up going to school the next day, after a long talk of convincing Tony that he needed to go and that he would be okay. In all honesty, he needed to see MJ and Ned. They had been texting for a while, but since the compound in flames had been on the news and things were crazy, Peter told them it was best if they met up when he got back to school. They didn't think he was coming back today, though. He kept that as a surprise.

So when he walked through the doors and saw them leaning against the wall with some of the Decathlon team by the back of the entrance, he smiled and took a deep breath. MJ spotted him before he even made it halfway across the room and she was shoving past people immediately, storming towards him.

Peter froze and started backing up with the look on her face but she quickly caught up to him and punched him hard in the arm, making Peter wince in pain.

"Are you *insane*?" she demanded furiously. "Coming back to school already? And I feel like I've said this before, oh wait, I have. Deja vu. Big time. So tell me when this Groundhog Day of you nearly getting blown up is over because I swear to God, Peter, you get hurt one more time and I will kill you myself." If it was anyone else, Peter would have flinched at that, but this was MJ and he smiled.

"Noted," he said happily.

She then reached and brushed his arm lightly where she had hit him and grumbled, "Sorry, Spidey."

Peter glared at her and looked around making sure no one heard her. Then he shook his head as he looked back at MJ, stupid grin spreading on his face, "No you're not."

"No, I'm not," she agreed with a small chuckle. "You okay though? I'm still trying to get used to the fact that you have super healing..."

Peter gave her a shrug and made a face, "Well I'm in one piece...so. Does that count as okay?" She looked like she was going to step forward to hug him and Peter was about to step forward too-

By now, the rest of the friend group had tripped over their own feet to reach him, Ned tackling him with a hug, cutting in front of MJ who set back on her heels. Peter laughed, wrapping his arms around his best friend and hugging him tightly, "Hey man."

"MJ, someone sounded worried," Sally said with a raised eyebrow, giving Peter a smile.

"I was not *worried*, I was just observant of a pattern," MJ snapped back defensively, but she made eye contact with Peter before looking down and tucking her hair behind her ear as she crossed her arms.

"So are you done leaving us, Peter?" Abe teased, clasping his friend's hand as he was welcomed back by his team.

"Yeah," Peter laughed lightly, giving them all a nod as he shoved his hands in his pockets. "I'm-I'm back for good."

There was a massive uproar of voices as people started filling him in on everything that happened at school, the debates he missed, the drama, what teacher did what- The shrill bell blared over them all, snapping his classmates out of their trances. MJ shooed everyone away, "Get out of our faces losers, don't be tardy." The rest of his friends waved and clapped him on the back and MJ and Ned came to either side, walking with him to the steps.

"You meant what you said, right? You're not leaving again?" Ned asked firmly.

Peter looked sideways at him and nodded, "Yeah, Ned. It's over."

"Is..." MJ trailed off and bit her lip.

"Yeah," Peter nodded.

"Oh shoot," Ned cursed. Peter and Mj both craned their necks to look at him and he winced. "Well, Pete, I didn't know you would be back today so I have a dentist appointment during chem. There's a lab."

Peter chuckled and clapped his friend on the back, "Dude, it's fine, I can do it myself, it's not like I

lost brain cells," he jokes. Ned gives him a smile and nods, taking his word for it, shoulders easing as he realized he didn't betray his best friend.

They talked about the newest Star Wars trailer, which Ned had to show him on his phone as they walked down the hallway, MJ pretending not to watch but stealing glances over his shoulder. MJ filled him in on Decathlon practice, and Ned explained the newest thing they were learning in physics. Then they reached their class and Ned gave them both a peace sign, "I gotta talk to the teacher about me leaving, so...I'll see ya MJ."

She gave him an L sign and he ducked through the doorway, leaving her alone with Peter who was rubbing the straps of his backpack awkwardly. She searched for eye contact with him and narrowed her gaze, "You gonna be okay?"

"Yeah," Peter nodded with assurance. "As long as no one clocks me in the ribs, which are still busted, I'll be okay."

"What if I just-" she juked and Peter put up his hands with a smile, their fingers brushing for a split second. Their smiles faded and they dropped their hands to the side. MJ pointed down the hall and mumbled, "Uh, I better-"

Peter nodded, crossing his arms and then shoving his hands into his pockets, "Yeah. I'll see you after- or at- I'll see you- I guess. At some time."

"Struggling?" she asked nervously.

"Shut up," Peter scoffed with a smile, his cheeks hot with embarrassment.

"Bye," she laughed, rolling her eyes at his nervous stutter before she turned and walked down the hallway.

Peter grinned and slipped into class, stopping by his teacher's desk. It wasn't hard to fake a smile after that encounter. "Peter!" she said happily. "It's good to see you again! Back for good this time?"

"Yes ma'am," Peter nodded happily.

She gave him a smile, "Good. And thank you for staying on top of your work."

Peter looked sideways at Ned and nodded, heading to his seat and doing his handshake with his best friend, "What would I do without you?"

"Fail high school and probably die because you swing into the wrong building or something," he said happily, a smile spreading onto his face and then disappearing just as quickly. "I'm still your guy in the chair, right? I mean I know you have all the compound Avengers super cool spy equipment now-" he said sadly.

Peter cut him off with a hand to his shoulder, "Ned," he laughed, "You will always be my guy in the chair."

"Just not this chair. T minus two minutes until I have to leave," he winced, pulling out his pass. Then he frowned as he caught a glance up front, "Or now, she's calling me, she's calling me-" then in a louder voice, "Yes?"

Their teacher had just flagged Peter's best friend down and suggested, "Ned, since you have to leave soon, I'll tell you to hold off on this lab until next class. You can make it up later and just go

to the office early," she directed, before scanning the classroom. "Peter, that means you are with..." her eyes fall on the teenager behind him that until this moment in time, Peter had forgotten was there. "Flash, do you have a partner?"

Peter's heart sank and he curled his fists. The bully looked up in shock and horror, face contorting into a snarl as he looked at Peter in disgust and then back at her. He hissed, "No w-"

"No? Good. You'll be with Peter," she said with a smile, evening out her papers and slipping them into her desk.

"Oh, God," Peter said out loud, unable to help himself.

Ned looked at him sideways apologetically, seeing the anger in Peter's eyes. "I can tell my mom to reschedule the appointment," he whispers helpfully. "I can say it was a mistake and stay."

Peter waved his friend off with a faked smile of assurance. "Go, bud, I'll be fine. I'll give you the notes tomorrow," he told him quietly, nodding to him. Ned winced and looked backwards at Flash who was fuming in his seat, eyes boring into the back of Peter's head he could tell. Peter gave him another, more firm nod, and his friend weakly pulled his backpack off the desk, letting it fall against his leg before practically dragging it up to the front. Ned turned in his pass and left, giving Peter one last look as he walked out the door.

"Flash, why don't you move up a seat?" his teacher suggested as she opened her computer, looking up again once there was no movement. She frowned and spoke again, urging, "Flash?"

The boy huffed and shoved his chair back, Peter flinching as it scraped against the floor. Flash took a few steps forward, purposely elbowing Peter out of the way and slamming his books down, slumping in the seat next to him, avoiding eye contact. The teacher noticed and she pursed her lips, looking between the two teenagers, the hatred blatant in the literal inches of open space that divided them. "Boys, is this going to be an issue?"

"No ma'am," Peter grumbled out quietly.

She nodded and turned to Flash, raising a dangerous eyebrow at his silence. The boy kicked his feet up on the desk and shook his head, sighing, "Nope."

"Good," she said firmly, tearing his eyes away. "If you would all please go to a lab station and start setting up. You can measure out the mixtures but do not combine them until I say. Get goggles and an apron remember."

Peter and Flash avoided looking at each other and Peter cursed himself for doing it but he bit his lip and mumbled, "I'll get goggles and aprons. You get the lab station." He started for the cabinet on the wall when a hand grabbed his shirt and yanked him back.

The bully gripped his collar, making sure the teacher's back was turned, "You telling me what to do? You just got back from another mystery vacation, Pete. Did another family member die?"

"It's Peter. And that's none of your business Eugene," Peter shot back.

Flash snorted at his confidence and hissed, "Just cause you got lucky with one punch-"

"You sure it was just one?" Peter countered furiously.

Flash winced and played it off cockily, finishing his sentence with a raised chin to try and be intimidating, "It doesn't mean you're mister tough guy all of a sudden-"

Peter whacked his hand off instantly, eyes flashing, "No, idiot. I'm trying to get us an A. I'll kill you if you make us fail this lab, and I'm guessing vice versa. And since you're someone who likes claiming territory, get us a frickin station, and I'll get the goggles and apron. That is, unless you want to get all three which I think i correctly assumed is too much for you to handle, right?"

The bully sized him up, narrowed his eyes, and then cursed at him, turning and walking for the nearest lab counter. Peter, breathing a sigh of relief at his small victory, quickly went to grab the goggles and the aprons, walking back over and handing one set to Flash who knocked it out of his hands and grabbed the other one. He pointed to the one on the floor and said cockily, "That's yours."

Peter glared at him and considered shooting a web at them and yanking them into his hands but instead he knelt and grabbed them, but he did untie Flash's shoe while he was down there without him noticing. Peter straightened and put on the goggles and apron, Flash faking a jab to his chest while his hands were behind his back.

"Gotcha," the bully snickered at Peter's reaction.

"Do it again, and I'll land one instead of just pump faking it," he threatened, tightening the knot and shoving past him to get to the test tubes, knocking the boy's shoulder hard.

"Whatever," Flash scoffed, but he backed off, flexing his arm.

When Peter got back with the equipment he closed his eyes and pleaded, "Look, I'll get us the A, let me do it all. Just stay over there."

"Yeah, okay control freak, but if we get anything lower than an 95, I'll beat the crap out of you," Flash warned dangerously, shoving a finger in his face.

"Any closer and I might lick it," Peter grinned.

"Screw the 95, let's go, right now," Flash said, his eyes gleaming, fists curling at his side.

Peter turned to the lab station riskily as he shot him a look, "Yeah, because that worked out well for you last time."

The bully didn't have a retort for that and Peter didn't give him any more precious attention. Instead, he got to work, measuring the first three liquids up just in time for his teacher to give directions for the next couple steps. He heated the liquids and mixed two of them over the fire, filling out the chart of reactions. Then he measured the mass again and jotted down the data, Flash peaking over and copying the numbers once he did. About five minutes later, Peter was done with everything, and he shut off the burner and the scale, setting the used test tubes back in their containers once he washed them out and cleaned them with a paper towel. He yanked his glasses over his head, nestling them atop his curls before he grabbed his pencil, about to start the equations section when Flash's paper was slammed down with a heavy palm over his own.

Peter was about to object when the boy crossed his arms, raised his eyebrow and looked pointedly at the sheet, which Peter glanced over again. The second half was already filled out with the equations and after some quick calculations in his head, perfected by late nights working in the lab with Tony, he realized they were right.

He looked up in shock and confused and the bully made a face in disgust, "One, I got into this school fair and square, I don't know what you heard. Second, I'm not getting soft on you, so keep your shirt on. Third, I'm not trying to help you, I just don't want you showing me up."

Peter said nothing except give him a look before he quickly scrawled down the numbers. Then, also realizing that the boy hadn't called him Parker yet, which he usually said in a derogatory way, he turned to Flash, about to say thank you for the equations.

This was right when one of the light bulbs on someone's lab station across from them burst, electricity zapping for a split second. The girl screamed in shock, realizing she had used all three plugs on a very old outlet, causing it to short.

The teacher reminded everyone to stay calm as she sighed and surveyed the damage, having two kids nearby wipe up the glass. Flash snorted and shook his head, "Chicks." He turned and saw Peter with white knuckles, clenching the lab counter for all he was worth. Peter was having trouble breathing, every hair on his body standing up.

Peter held seen that coming. His spidey sense had tingled and he stared right at the bulb, watching it explode, watching the small bolt of lightning erupt from the inside, hearing the zapping and buzzing sound it made, practically feeling the zap himself. It wasn't much. But it was enough. The girl's scream morphed into his own.

"You little-" Damian slams his heel into Peter's stomach and he doubles over in pain before feeling the shock at his shoulder this time, and this time it doesn't stop.

"Sick bast-" Tony swears from behind in utter helplessness, and Peter can hear his muffled struggling but then his ears start to ring.

A scream tears itself from Peter's closed throat as he arches his back, trying to get away from the agony. He's trapped in his own body, unable to move except for his shaking, his legs kicking on their own accord. He feels tears come to his eyes as his limbs clench and strain. His cut on his cheek splits from his scream, the pain like fire coursing through his veins, the stick scalding his skin. Peter's gasping for breath on the ground, teeth are chattering, his hands shaking.

His chest starts burning and he opens his mouth to breathe, no sound coming out. He swears there's some sort of prod being jammed into the center of his rib cage in the middle of his chem classroom, dug further and further into his sternum, but there is nothing in front of him except a black counter and brown drawers that are going fuzzy.

Flash frowns and scoffs, "Hey, freak? What the hell is wrong with you?"

Peter tries to calm down but now it's all crashing- oh God. His head starts pounding, his mouth suddenly becoming dry. He chokes on his inhale, prying a hand off the counter to clutch at his chest as he doubles over. His legs tremble and they threaten to give out on him as he sinks lower to the floor. His ears are ringing and his limbs are stiff, so so stiff. He's fighting to keep his head above the surface, trying to hold onto the last bit of light he sees in a wave of darkness.

Flash is starting to get concerned and he mutters nervously, "Hey, Peter, quit it. What are you doing?"

And then it gets worse. Peter remembers the cold floor he was pressed into, that scratched his skin as he twisted in agony on the floor. He remembers the pain, the sharp searing pain, the smell of his own burning flesh, the taste of bile and pennies and blood and sweat and tears and-

Peter lets out a shaky exhale and immediately regrets it, face turning a sickly pale as he swallows back nausea and dry heaves, his stomach flopping. No God, not again. He'd thrown up enough to last him a month last night, there was nothing left to heave up.

"Peter, seriously dude, quit it, you're freaking me the heck out," Flash informs him furiously, shoving Peter lightly in the shoulder but the teen doesn't even budge. In fact, when he turns his head, there are tears in his eyes. Flash blinks in shock and confusion, staring to get freaked out but still determined to play the bully card as he snorts halfheartedly, "You baby, what the hell are you crying for, did some light bulb scare you?"

Peter squeezes his eyes shut, leaning heavily against the counter, entire body shaking, flinching every once in a while. He shakes his head slowly and Flash realizes he's answering his question. This wasn't about the light bulb, this was about something else, something worse. Peter went spiraling, the room flickering around him as he heard Tony's protests in his ears, Damian's looming shadow over him as he ruthlessly slammed the prod into his side and making him convulse without a second thought.

Peter saw Flash curse, realizing that his insults weren't doing anything and he mutters, "Ok, screw you Peter, you're freaking me out-" he calls their teacher over, whose eyes widened when she saw Peter. He managed to conceal the shaking, in fear others were looking, but most were still obsessed with the broken light bulb. She saw him bent over with his hand clasped over his chest and stomach, face a pale shade of green. Rightly, she assumed he was going to be sick and she instantly stepped aside, saying, "Well, take him to the nurse!"

It took the bully standing with his arms crossed, glaring down at Peter to realize she was talking to him and he turned in disbelief, scoffing, "Me?"

"Yes, Flash, you. Help him up and take him to the nurse," she demanded. "Are you that inconsiderate? I can write you up, young man."

Flash glared at her and hissed, "Fine." He stormed forward and grabbed Peter's arm, yanking him roughly to his feet before shoving him forward, nearly making him throw up right then and there.

They walked past the teacher and Flash snarled once they were out of ear shot, "Don't you dare lean on me or even touch me for that matter. And if you throw up on me, I'll be pissed." He kicked the door open with his foot and Peter slipped out, his eyesight going in and out of focus as the walls spun and bent in half. He stumbled down the hall and then turned left instead of right, heading for the bathroom, not the nurse's office.

"Peter!" Flash snarled, "Where the hell are you going?"

Peter kept his eyes forward, feeling the vibration of the floor as Flash caught up to him and tugged on his sleeve. He whipped his arm and twisted it, breaking the hold as his shoulder slammed hard against the wall, his balance failing him. Everything was spinning as his hands grasped the wall tile in attempt to straighten himself. His feet stumbled and that was when he pitched forward, letting out a groan and thinking about how much it would hurt and how much effort it would take to get up.

Someone slipped underneath him and Flash cursed as he took his weight, realizing where Peter was headed as he grabbed his shoulder and hoisted his arm around his neck, muttering, "Don't give me crap for this." Flash was the last person Peter expected to be under his arm, but there he was, with a furious expression on his face, yes, but still there.

He and Peter staggered to the boy's bathroom and Flash yanked a confused and scared freshman who was about to enter out of the way by his collar, shoving Peter not all that gently inside before kicking away the door stop.

Peter hit the ground and flinched, scrambling forward to get to the wall.

His body continues to flinch and thrash on it's own accord from the current and he hears someone yelling- besides himself. A second later it stops and the muffled sound turns out to be Tony's screams.

No, it's Flash.

"Peter! Calm the heck down, man, what the hell?"

He collapses to the ground, his body twitching as voices sound underwater and barely audible to him and his fuzzy vision. He lets out a muffled cry, his jaw locking, muscles spazing. His feet kick and Peter grits his chattering teeth, trying to steady his shaking breathing.

"Are we having fun yet, Pe-"

"-TER!" Flash demands, now crouched at his side. Peter glances up weakly and is shocked to see a hint of concern in the bully's gaze. Peter's shaking and Flash awkwardly reaches forward to try and hold down his shoulder but Peter moves, Flash's finger getting caught in his sleeve. It pulls it up just high enough that Flash can see one of his many scars, the burn, dark on Peter's shoulder.

Peter lets out an inhuman sound and shoves himself away in anger and fear, yanking down his sleeve and clapping his hand over it, suddenly trying to divert some of his rapidly draining energy to make sure every scar is covered. Flash swallows as the boy presses his back against the wall, tears in his eyes, hands hovering over his head.

A second later, the bully pulls up his sleeve and kicks Peter lightly, which gets his attention, "I have them too. Different reasons, I take it," he mumbles without humor. "These are from my dad."

Peter glances up, breathing hard, and sees a cigarette burn on the bully's arm, a couple of them, actually, all looking rather painful. But no one would ever know. Flash is looking at them with hate, a different hate than what he looked at Peter with, this is a look of utter loathing. Peter realizes the look he gets is not that bad, and that the reason why the look is shot in his direction is because of the pain Flash is already in.

The bully nods while biting his cheek and laughs without any humor, for once, "You're not the only one with scars. I guess we both hide them pretty well. I'll give you props, Peter."

Peter can't breathe as he stares at the boy he has known to be his tormentor all his life. He was actually feeling sorry for, he was actually relating to, he was actually understanding the bully. For a split second, Peter blinks and breathes normally, staring at his enemy in shock as he sees sadness and pain on the boy's usually chiseled face. There's emotion there, a sliver of horror as he realizes he revealed a secret to his probably least favorite person in school. And Peter can't look at him the same.

"Are we having fun yet, Peter?"

Damian's voice drags him back and Peter screws up his eyes and nods, trying to thank Flash for his attempt at helping, ducking his head into his chest, the sheer thought of stopping the panic attack, making it get worse, like being told not to look at something and feeling that rising urge to glance directly at the object. He's now realizing that there was no transition from being able to breathe to being sucked back under the surface, maybe because he had never broken free. And he didn't have the strength to.

The shock is right in the center of his chest and he clamps his mouth shut, jerking on his cuffs as his body trembles. It's dug in harder and Peter can literally feel his rib cage cracking, muscles

being stretched and pulled, still unable to break away. His teeth clench and he bites his cheek so hard he draws blood. A white pain erupts in his head, and with a caving chest, Peter can't hold it back any longer- he lets out a scream of pain that rips through his throat and fills the room.

There are tears on Peter's cheeks as he remembers that torture session, something that seemed like so long ago, but which's scars still hadn't healed. A constant reminder that his threshold of pain was put to the test and broken, he was broken, beaten until the point that he passed out and let the shocks just ripple through his unconscious body, leaving Tony alone, allowing him to get beat up for defending him.

Wow.

His thoughts were running wild.

"God please, stop-" he begged them, he begged himself. And then he realized it hadn't been in his brain, he had said it out loud. And then something happened that he never thought would.

"Listen up you pathetic wimp, you will only get my help once. So what the hell do I do to get you to shut up?" Flash demands, moving forward and crouching by his side, eyes glancing over Peter, wincing at the utter pain he's radiating off. A sliver of morals, a glimpse of the human beneath the usual sneer was visible.

"Tony," Peter makes out desperately. "Hit Emergency Contact-"

"What?" Flash demands, spreading his hands and looking around in confusion.

Peter brings a hand away from his head and digs into his pocket with a whimper as the ringing in his ears gets worse. He cries out, "Tony," sliding the phone forward across the floor as he doubles over.

"Tony?" Flash repeats, before it dawns on him and the bully's eyes widen and he snarls, "You've got to be kidding me." Peter's face falls and he shoves his head back against the wall as Flash demands, "Tony Stark? Tony Stark? Really, Peter? Really?"

"Please," Peter begs, beginning to fall on his side and he doesn't even shoot an arm out to catch himself because his hands are too busy being pressed against his ears to stop the ringing. Without even realizing, Peter's voice breaks into a low tremble and Flash curses, scooping up his phone after his hand shoots out to grab Peter's arm tightly and keep him leaning against the wall.

He curses Peter under his breath and shakes his head, but Flash pushes the emergency phone. It dials, and when the ring changes tones, Flash frowns. Then a voice meets his ears and the bully's jaw drops in utter shock.

"Pete? What's wrong?"

Flash has to lick his lips and find his voice, looking at the boy who is violently shaking in front of him. "Um- sir, this is- this is Eugene T-Thompson?"

The man's tone changes even before his voice comes through, in the *silence*. *"Flash?"*

Flash looks incredulously at Peter and chokes out, "Yeah, some people call me that-" he swallows and shakes his head, focusing on the reason he called, "Peter needs you. He told me to call you-"

"What the hell did you to do my kid?"

My kid? Did he just say 'my kid'? Also the question...what does he say to that? God, his head is spinning. Peter wasn't lying. And now he was talking to Tony Stark on the phone, who's voice alone told Flash that he had been so wrong about their relationship, and that maybe Peter's last name was Stark.

Flash winces at a loud sound and he hears the iconic, universally known sound of the Iron Man blaster. He's quick to respond, "I- I didn't do anything M-mr. Stark, he kind of just dropped while we were doing a lab and I can't get him to shut up- I mean stop- he's shaking- I don't know what's wrong with him."

"Stay there," Tony directs and the call ends.

Flash looks down at Peter who groans in pain, wincing at the bright lights, digging his head farther into his arms. Flash blinks, staring at him before he manages to say, "Well you weren't lying about the Stark Internship, were you?"

"Sur- pri- se," Peter says through the gasps of pain.

"Tony's- he's coming," Flash said assuredly before he nearly throws up at the tone he used. He's trying to look at the shaking boy with annoyance and disgust but he can't. He lowers his tone and mixes the bite back in, cursing at Peter, "If you die on me before Tony frickin Stark shows up and he murders me, I'll kill you."

Peter nods weakly, and it feels like a second later that the door is practically blown off, slamming into the wall, the hinges bent, the wood around the lock, splintered. The Iron Man suit comes in and it peels away, Tony Stark stepping down from it and walking forward, heading for Flash quicker than he expected. His pace is fast and he crosses the room in seconds, pulling off his sunglasses, his eyes piercing. His walk makes the scared and intimidated teenager scramble back, even though his gaze is on the boy behind him.

"Move," Tony snarls, not even looking at the boy in his way and Flash trips over his own feet, practically diving to the sinks, eyes wide, jaw to his chest. Then Flash's gaze switches to Peter who is now rigid, head in his hands, sitting against the wall, rubbing his head harshly in the tile as he shakes. His hands are over his eyes and temples. Tony kneels by his side and brushes a hand through his curls, murmuring words that he can't hear.

Tony's hand tightens on Peter's arm and he can feel the tense muscles beneath his sleeve as he squeezes it and says to the broken teen, "Peter, it's me."

"I feel like we didn't get out," the boy whimpers, his voice exhausted. "I know we did but it's just so real and I couldn't stop it, it was a stupid thing and I still couldn't stop it-"

"Peter, Peter, look at me," Tony urges and he lifts the kid's chin. "I'm right here. It's okay. It happens. It happens. But i need you to breathe, you understand? I need you to breathe for me."

Peter obeys even though it hurts, gripping Tony's hand tightly as he nods violently, his chest shuddering.

"That's it, kid, easy. Can you see?"

"Yeah-" Peter blinks harshly, trying to focus on his surroundings, flinching every once in a while, each jerk he makes in Tony's grasp bringing tears to his eyes as he pleads for the man to save him with a gaze.

"What's wrong with him?" Flash asks slowly, watching awkwardly from the side. He wouldn't tell

anyone this, but he was jealous from the way Tony looked at Peter, the way he dove to his side and clasped the back of his head, hand in his hair. His dad never gave him that attention, his dad never gave him that love, or the gentle touch.

And although it scared him, he was jealous because of the look that Tony gave him when he whipped his head over his shoulder and glared. It was the same intensity as the look that Flash gave his scars, and he never thought someone could care so deeply about a person that the action of someone even remotely insulting them flipped a switch.

"What did you just say?" The man hissed protectively and instinctively shifted in front of Peter.

Flash gulped and instantly shook his head, "N-no, not like that. Just- is he okay?"

Tony's gaze broke and he looked quickly over his shoulder, hand on Peter's arm still. He flicks another glare, but a smoother one this time, at Flash and says, "Yeah," through his teeth before pointing at him with anger, "You're lucky I don't make every college promise to not accept you, Eugene-"

Flash's eyes widened in shock and he nearly choked because Tony Stark had the ability to do that and he typically didn't make promises he couldn't keep. But then Peter gripped the billionaire's arm and made out, "No- no, he helped- wasn't him-" Flash's gaze fell on Peter and it softened slightly, blinking in confusion shortly after. He dares to meet Tony's eyes and the gaze is, once again, less harsh. It's not trusting at all, but it's not murderous.

Peter's head exploded with pain and he ducked his head into Tony's chest, his fist curling around the man's jacket as he squeezes his eyes shut. Tony's arm loops around him and they talk for a bit more, Flash watching he pulls him slowly to his feet, the two of them looping arms like they had done this before. Peter's leaning into Tony's side and Flash is staring dumbly. He blinks and holds out Peter's phone, which Tony takes with a nod and slips into his pocket.

"Thanks," Tony says simply to Flash who nods once and watches them head for the door.

And he doesn't move for a long time. The last five minutes were choppy and short. It had all happened so fast he didn't even get a chance to register it. He looks back at the floor where the man had been crouched by the teenager and realizes that it had probably been much longer than what he remembered. He was just so confused, so in shock, and so furious. Furious that he didn't have what they had. He stood there for at least ten minutes.

Because he was jealous of the way that Tony looks at Peter like he's the only thing he cares about in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guysssss <3 <3 <3 I really hope that one was better :))) I felt back into my groove and chuckled at some of the lines and liked the flow AND MOST IMPORTANTLY I had a blast writing it. EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY i hope yall liked it because if you didnt well....that would be bad lol

I did not check the word count wups idk how long it is. WE HIT 40 K THO WHAT THE HECK THAT IS CRAZY AHHHHHH

Ok im hyped and its like midnight so i need to head to bed which is good because that means i wont get sad *massive sob* i need coffee yes its almost midnight and i have to

be up at 6:30 so????

Next chapter is the LAST CHAPTER. It may be like 15k words but it will still be the last chapter and that kills me inside but omg i am very excited to write it. This story has been an amazing part of my life for what the past like....how many months??? like four at least right? Time flies when youre having fun and i have definitely had a blast writing this.

As for time, my week is about to get hectic and i have a lot of school stuff due etc ik yall feel me on that one and ur support is constantly appreciated so just stay tuned and stay w me in terms of last chapter because it may take a lil bit. But it will be worth it.

Im honestly so excited >:) its going to be rly good i wont lie

I really hope you liked this one, we kind gave flash a redemption, i kinda went ballistic with the POV changes at the end but idk i felt it fit dont ask why. PLEASE leave feedback, i love all of your comments they are so encouraging and i am going to sincerely miss them sm after next chapter BUT HEY STAY TUNED FOR MORE PROJECTS BECAUSE WEVE GOT SOME WRITING TO DO

HOWEVER I AM GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF

this is the second to last

happy vibes from here out

stay safe, stay healthy, stay TUNED! you are all amazing people, have a wonderful day, and as always because it is honestly so so true:

I love you 3000 <3 <3 :)

Best Days of My Life

Chapter Summary

RIP Eddie Van Halen, one of the best rock singers ever, who I loved, who many loved. He lived an amazing life and was taken way too soon, cancer is just awful. Highly suggest listening to his songs if you haven't heard of him. You will be missed Eddie <3 <3

Chapter Notes

Hey lovely readers <3 <3

This is rly bittersweet for me, I'm sorry this took a while, it was not only because of school but because i rly didnt want to write this chapter because i dont want this story to be over :(This has been an amazing ride, thank everyone who has stuck with me on this, I've had a blast, I hope you have too. This seems so wrong, even the ending does because Im expecting like another chapter but sadly no :(this it :(

I would also like to thank mouth_breather011 from the bottom of my heart because this idea was all theirs and i dont think either of us were thinking this would blow up and become this massive thing which has just been insane but FULL CREDIT TO THEM FOR GIVING ME THIS AMAZING IDEA <3 <3

I promised to end on a good note, and I will deliver. Two words to describe this chapter: Happy. Vibes. Happy vibes 24/7. I really hope you like it, yall deserve the best, the support on this has been amazing i am constantly floored by all yalls comments so thank you so so much!

I hope you all are doing well and getting sleep and drinking coffee and staying healthy and all of that fun stuff <3

Im sorry if life is icky atm i totally feel that so just hang in there you awesome people!!!

I have sm energy but its drained rn im sorry XD please enjoy the chapter, i rly hope you like it i had a lot of fun writing it but was also kinda sad XD

OMG I NEED TO STOP BEING SAD ILL BE SAD IN THE END NOTE OKAY I LOVE ALL OF YOU GET HYPED FOR THIS CHAOTIC CHAPTER BECAUSE AT SOME POINTS ITS JUST LEGIT CHAOS PLEASE EXCUSE MY SLEEP DEPRIVED HUMOR AND JUST HAVE FUN READING <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter remembers the first time he saw that car. He had blinked, looking up from his phone as he stared at it, parked right in front of the door to the lobby. Shaking his head, he walks in, jogging up the steps, humming along to 'Left Hand Free'. He unlocked the door with one hand and walked in, looping around the kitchen as he sets down his bag and turns to the couch, "Hey, Aunt May."

He rubs his chin and turns, taking out his earbud as she responds, "Hey. How was school today?"

"Okay," he says slowly. "This crazy car parked outside-" And then he sees him. Tony Stark,

sitting on the couch with his aunt. Peter's first glance is shock, his heart just stopping, a smile spreading on his face as he stands before his lifelong idol. Tony's smiling at him.

The second time, he actually got to get in the car, driving home after the airport battle in Germany. The man had dropped him off at his apartment after a very entertaining conversation with Happy in the front seat. Peter had been very talkative then, still nervous, but talkative. Tony had reached forward and Peter had hugged him in confusion, before realizing he was opening the door. There was a time during the three months where Peter was worried that was the only time he got to hug the man who changed his life. He was relieved it wasn't.

Now, he was in the passenger's seat and silent. He and Tony were different people than they had been all those months ago. They had gone through absolutely everything together. The ride wasn't exactly awkward...Peter decided he couldn't find the right word for it. He centers himself and tries to go through the past couple minutes, his brain trying desperately to catch up. He wanted to collapse against the side of the car and close his eyes but he knew he couldn't even if he tried. It was similar to how he felt every night when attempting to sleep.

Okay.

Think.

Five minutes ago.

Had Tony walked Peter to the principal's office to check him out? Yes. Luckily, everyone was in class, so the halls were empty. Tony revealed that he had actually come through the back entrance which was a second away from the bathroom he had tracked Peter's phone to. The boy had calmed down by the time they were halfway to the office, able to walk on his own and see and breathe normally.

Somehow that was worse.

He hated that he was fine when he was so broken a few seconds ago. He hated that he could move his legs when before he felt as if he had no control over everything. Tony being here calmed him down immensely, but he was embarrassed he even had to call him in the first place. And Flash...that was complicated. They had left the bully in the bathroom, jaw dropped, eyes wide. Peter doesn't think he's even moved an inch. Their relationship had definitely changed over the past couple minutes and Peter couldn't wait to somehow explain to Tony that Flash had been the one to loop his arm over his shoulder and half drag him to the bathroom.

Tony and Peter walking into the office was something he would remember for the rest of his life. The looks he got was just a mixture of utter confusion and shock and it made Peter's stomach flip in a way that for once, didn't make him nauseous. Tony flashed a smile like he owned the place, and talked his way into the principal's office almost immediately, laughing out excuses of why he didn't do this sooner- 'this' being some of the paper work that needed to be filled out to make him the person that could check Peter out of school.

A while ago he said he would have done it without doing the paperwork because 'what are they gonna do, stop me? I'm Tony Stark'. Morita was more than happy to help, not pressuring Peter into answering any questions, even though he was sure he had plenty due to the look on his face. Once that was done, they simply walked out. Peter wasn't sure what he was expecting, but it wasn't just walking out, which is what happened.

He was sure someone saw them leaving (they had avoided most people so far) because Tony raised an eyebrow, pulling out and handing him back his phone that he had in his pocket from when Flash

gave it to him. "It's your girlfriend, checking up on you," he had said with a smirk, trying to lighten the mood and disperse the exhaustion that clouded around the teen like smoke.

Peter snatched it and read the message from MJ that read: **'Hope ur ok, btw theres a live stream of u walking out w/ Stark so dont turn around. Ill take care of it, also got ur backpack, come get it later. text me the min u get back to compound- no more freaking out u hear me?'**

Peter slipped it back into his pocket, feeling the recording camera on his back from a couple hallways down. Tony opened the door, they stepped out, walked down the steps of the school and a second later, a car pulled up just in time for them to get in. There was no driver and Tony winked, "I'm like a boy scout. Always prepared."

The boy rolled his eyes and held back a scoff, and Tony poked his head over the hood of the car, calling, "Get in loser, we're going home."

Peter repeated his previous facial expressions at the 'Mean Girls' quote before slipping into the seat with a wince, holding his chest. Tony gives him a concerned look when he starts the car and pulls away, Peter nodding in assurance. They go about two streets without talking and Peter's the one who breaks the silence.

"Tony, I-" he mumbled, wringing his hands.

"If you're gonna start with something, don't start with that," Tony cut him off immediately, somehow knowing he was going to apologize. Peter turns his head and before he can even open his mouth to counter, the man shakes his head and repeats, "Nope. Don't."

The man had a company to run, for gosh sakes, and Peter was here being selfish, asking him to fly all the way out to his school in a panic, just to help him take a breath. Deep down, he knows that Tony being there was the only thing that could have calmed him down; the minute the man knelt by his side, Peter felt a sense of protection, a feeling that he was safe. But even if calling Tony was the only option, it didn't mean it was the right one.

"But-" Peter insisted.

"Do you want to hear it in another language?" Tony demanded, putting a pin in Peter's thoughts as well somehow. "Stop," he says more firmly. He gave Peter a look and he read it instantly, feeling so unworthy of what was behind it. *Kid, I'd do anything for you.*

Peter returns the look before Tony gives him a grin and ruffles his hair. The boy sighs once the hand leaves his curls and purses his lips as he leans against the window. Seconds later, Tony looks over cautiously and asks, "Are you okay?"

Peter nods, running a hand over his face and blinking harshly, "Yeah. It was stupid. Just some lightbulb exploded," his voice broke and he tried to laugh as he shook his head, "it was simple as a lightbulb exploding-"

"It happens," Tony insists, his hands tight on the steering wheel. He shrugs, "For me it was a really crappy drawing made by a kid who was in 'A Christmas Story'."

Peter frowns, "You had a panic attack because of a kid in 'A Christmas Story'?"

Tony shoots him a look, "It's called a joke."

"There was no kid?" Peter asked slowly, confused.

"No," Tony winces in exasperation and takes a breath, explaining, "there was a kid, I don't know if he was the kid in 'A Christmas Story' because I was just making a joke, but you know what, it could have been him, who freaking knows, I guess we'll never find out. He drew me a picture of the New York battle in crayons. One look and....it just took one look," Tony said with a sad smile, his tone dropping as his voice dies off.

"Well..." Peter says slowly, "Thanks for coming."

"You don't need to thank me, kid," Tony says, like he's never been more sure about anything in the world.

Peter looked at him sadly, reminded of the weight on the man's shoulders that he conceals so well but sensing the kid's gaze of pity, Tony turns with gleaming eyes and suggests brightly, "How about some Van Halen? Yes? Good answer."

And that was the end of that. The radio blared and slowly but surely Peter's shoulders relaxed, listening to Tony shout along the chorus and drum his hands on the steering wheel, playing air guitar when there was a red light. By the time they pulled into the garage, there was a smile on Peter's face. Tony puts the car in park and lets the song finish before taking the key's out of the ignition.

"Well, you got home at a good time," Tony says with a sigh as they get out of the car and close their doors at the same time. They loop around the front, walking to the elevator across the parking lot, "Also I should have had you drive, dangit."

Peter smirks as Tony clicks the lock for the car and then asks curiously, "Why is it a good time?"

Tony starts to smile as he pushes the button on the wall, waiting for a split second before the doors open. They step into the elevator on the garage level, "We had a conference today, Bruce and Vision went to go meet with the Board so it ended early. And it was in the main room. With the swivel rolling chairs." Enough was said.

"Oh no," Peter groans, running a hand through his hair as the doors shut.

"Oh yes," Tony nods with a chuckle, hitting their floor number and leaning against the opposite side of the elevator, squinting to jog his memory. "Right now Steve is leading, but Nat is probably gonna beat him. I left before I could put them all to shame."

"First of all, you're slow. Second, why do they always do the chair races when I'm not here?" Peter mumbles, crossing his arms, hearing the low ding of each floor change as they ascended to the upper level of the compound.

Tony shrugs and answers simply with a hint of a proud smile, "Because you always beat them."

"True," Peter admits. Then the elevator slows and stops with a loud screech that makes him wince. He stumbles, grabbing the railing, eyes widening in panic and he stands straight, looking around. He turns to Tony, "What's-"

The man is already taking a big jump and lands harshly, the elevator shaking as Tony frowns at the lack of effect he had on their situation. He bends his knees to jump again and Peter slaps his arm furiously, "Don't do that."

"Why not?" Tony jumps again before Peter can stop him, keeping eye contact with him the entire way up and down, higher this time, and then he lands, shaking the elevator again. "It helps," Tony sniffs, and a second later the elevator creaks, dropping a small bit beneath their feet, sending both

of them stumbling back and gripping the rails. Tony's face is white and he nods, "Okay, taking your advice...won't do that. FRIDAY?"

"Working on it. Electrical failure, one of the wires is due for replacement today. Stand by."

"Hey, didn't you save people from an elevator once?" Tony demands. "Get us out of here."

"I wasn't *in* the elevator! I was on the outside, and I had to fall down the shaft- I am *not* doing that again. Hey, didn't you save the world? You're more qualified," Peter sniffed.

"It's because you're not an Avenger," Tony teases, Peter giving him a look at his choice of humor in a situation like this.

"And you are, so once again, get us the heck out of here," Peter narrows his eyes.

"Don't put me on the spot like that, now I'm simply not going to out of spite," Tony decides, crossing his arms.

Peter blinks at him. "You're very helpful. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Tony responds with a sarcastic smile. Peter makes a face as he inches over to the panel, starting to press the help button and flick the switch up and down. "That's not gonna work, kid," Tony chuckles. Peter turns to him and narrows his eyes, clicking the button harder while making dead eye contact.

"Stop, you're gonna break it," Tony chides, scoffing at him.

"You were the one who jumped!" Peter points out in shock.

"Because that's helpful," Tony countered with a scowl, demonstrating what he was attempting to do with two of his fingers as he created a model of the elevator and the shaft. "Mechanically, it has an impact." He displayed the simulation he had signed out and Peter blinked, unimpressed. "Clicking a button that doesn't have a correct wire connection is useless," Tony concluded with a confident smile before looking at the ceiling. "FRIDAY, what's taking so long?"

"We had to reboot the system, Tony. It's just bad timing. Nothing to be alarmed about."

"Alarmed? I'm stuck in an elevator- *Tony Stark* is stuck in an elevator, in his own compound. The news is gonna go nuts," Tony groaned, rubbing a hand over his face with a long sigh.

Peter frowned, still absentmindedly hitting the button, "The news isn't here, though?"

"They always find out- stop hitting the button!" Tony instructs in exasperation.

The elevator lights up and creaks, beginning to move up again and Peter grins triumphantly, raising his chin and announcing, "I did it. One hundred percent my doing. And I'm not even an Avenger. I think I should be now."

Tony's face screws up and he sneers, "Absolutely not-" The doors open and they both lunge forward, rushing to be the first one out, stumbling into the hallway before straightening their jackets and breathing a sigh. "We're not talking about that," Tony pointed at him, clapping his shoulder.

"No absolutely not," Peter agrees as they head down the hallway. Peter turns the corner, only to be yanked backward by Tony by the back of his shirt, just in time too; Clint zoomed past them on one

of the office chairs, taking a spill towards the end of the hallway, he and the chair going opposite directions. Peter stumbled into Tony who caught him with a smile and set him straight and they both peaked into the hallway.

Wanda, who was timing, flicked the chair that was tumbling toward her aside with her finger, not even looking up. "9.65 seconds," she called and from the ground Clint groaned, dragging himself to his feet and righting the chair, rubbing his pants.

"Whats the record?" Peter called, he and Tony walking forward, the rest of the team perking up when they heard his voice and then groaning.

"You okay, kid?" Steve asked seriously, searching his gaze. The rest of the Avengers waited respectfully for his answer.

Peter nodded, giving them all a small smile, "Yeah, yeah, I'm good."

"Well that means we're all gonna lose now," Sam grumbled, winking at the teen before suggesting, "At least do teams, so Tony can slow Peter down."

Tony gasped in shock and glared at him, "You're paying rent now." Peter gave Tony a pat on the shoulder and they took their spots at the end of the hallway, Tony tossing his jacket to the side, Natasha whistling in a mockery. Rhodey snorted and Tony waved him off. "Normal teams?" he asked, pointing at everyone. That meant Sam and Bucky, Nat and Clint, Cap and Rhodey. Wanda was sitting this one out as the unbiased timer. Everyone nodded.

Cap and Sam were up first, grumbling insults back and forth. They both swiveled the chairs around, feet firm against the floor, waiting for the signal. Wanda snapped and there was a small spark in front of them as they both started pushing their chairs backwards, gaining speed as they made their way down the hallway.

"Don't say it," Sam swore, shaking his head as he glared sideways at his friend.

Cap grinned and pulled away, driving his feet against the ground faster as he passed him effortlessly, "On your left."

"Cap won," Tony announced as Steve crossed the line a couple seconds before a fuming Wilson. They dragged their chairs back and Sam shoved Steve in the chest, Cap laughing as he high-fived Rhodey.

Clint and Peter were next and Hawkeye looked over with wide eyes, "You know, Peter, you had a rough day. If you need me to go slow, I can definitely go slow-"

"Shut up, Barton," Peter grinned, gripping the sides of the chair and looking at Tony who winked. He smiled and pushed his heels against the ground, waiting for the flash of red that signaled them. He drove backward, instantly getting ahead of Clint, and zooming down the hallway, lifting his feet as he rolled across the finish line. Clint crossed it a couple seconds later, with a firm glare on his face and Peter smiled, "Was that slow enough for you?"

Clint mocked him in a high pitch voice, starting to stand and Peter fake sneezed, innocently shooting a web at his foot that was on the chair. He made a face and winced, rubbing his nose, "Oops sorry."

Clint groaned and cursed, "I hate you." He knelt with his knife he kept on his leg to slice it off, throwing the sticky web back at Peter who ducked, laughing as he pushed the chair back to the start.

"I carry this team," Peter told Tony simply, and the man made face and lightly shoved his head, messing up his hair.

"Shut up, kid. I rock." Tony took his seat, spinning once to get a feel for it, Bucky settling down beside him. "You're gonna eat my dust Manchurian Candidate," Tony informed him with a cocky smile.

Bucky snorted, "Yeah, okay tin can."

"No December jokes," Cap snapped, looking at Tony who shut his mouth before he could say one and gave him an innocent smile.

There was a flash and they both started backwards, Tony holding his own and crossing the finish line at the same time as Bucky. Wanda smirked and announced, "I know boys don't like to hear this, but it was a tie."

"I think I clearly won, just for the record," Tony announced, shrugging as he started back.

"I wiped the floor with you," Bucky countered, knocking his chair into his.

"You had a gun in my face and I disabled it with one hand and avoided getting shot Mr. Super Solider," Tony sneered, hitting his chair harder.

"Chair please, boys," Natasha sighed in annoyance, Tony rolling it over to her. She smirked as she sank into her seat, "Who are you routing for Tony?"

Tony frowned as he took his place next to Peter, looking between Nat and Rhodey, "That's a trick question. Either way I would get punished so I am not going to comment."

"Wow," Rhodey scoffed.

"Would *you* want Nat mad at you?" Tony demanded, and his friend considered this, looked over at Natasha who had her eyebrow raised, fiery red hair falling over her shoulders as she turned with narrowed eyes.

"Nope. No comment works," he agreed, getting ready. There was a flash and they started backward, Natasha winning by a foot.

She stood proudly and winked at Rhodey, Wanda giving her a fist bump at the end. Nat put her hand on her hip and pouted her lower lip, "Looks like someone skipped leg day at the gym."

"I was paralyzed, okay?" Rhodey countered, the rest of the team snickering as they see his slight smirk. He kills it and grumbles, "I'm glad you all think it's funny. It wasn't. It was very not funny. And Vision's not here so I can pull that card without hurting his feelings."

Tony looked over at Peter who had his arms crossed as same as he did and Tony smiled, wrapping an arm around his shoulder and tightening on instinct. Peter looked at him and took a deep breath, and Tony nodded at him. Then they started returning the chairs to the conference room, the boy flexing his hands that were no longer shaking. Wanda tallied up the scores. Everyone knew who had won. The proud smirks on Tony and Peter's faces proved it, and now they had bragging rights for at least the next week.

It was about 9 o'clock when Peter remembered MJ still had his backpack. He had texted her he had

gotten back to the compound and then a little after that, but she still had his bag. He walked quickly into the kitchen and told Tony this, dragging him out, regretting say what he did in front of the people in that room because all the Avengers had wished him good luck on his non-existent date, calling after him about kisses and girlfriends.

"Can we just swing by?" Peter pleaded once they were out of ear shot walking down the hallway. "I need it for school tomorrow anyway, and- I texted her she said she's home, her mom has a late shift-"

"Yeah, kid," Tony shrugged, before raising his eyebrows. "Parents aren't home?" Peter scowled and kicked him in the shin. Tony snickered after wincing, hoping on one foot for a couple steps and spluttering, "I'm kidding! Of course I'm kidding, I'm very mature. You probably think you're gonna walk through the front door too, don't ya?"

Peter looks up at him as Tony puts his hands on his arms and steers him for the lab, Peter turning his head to look behind him at the stairs to the garage they just passed. "What? Woah, woah- hold on-"

"She knows you're Spiderman," Tony shrugged, like that explained everything. "You have to, it's a must."

Peter starts trying to backpedal but Tony's got him by the shoulders, pushing him gently forward into the lab and pointing to the suit that he had left behind the other day when he went to school. "No," Peter says immediately, turning to face Tony and shaking his head, putting out his hand as if the other signs weren't clear enough.

There's a massive grin on the man's face as he starts forward and throws his hands up, gesturing to the suit like he had just won a million dollars. "Yes."

"NO!" Peter repeated incredulously.

"I'll tell you exactly what to do, Peter, come on. She obviously likes you," he urges, raising his eyebrows.

"We're just friends," Peter insists weakly, glancing at the suit, suddenly tempted.

Tony blinks sarcastically and runs a hand over his face, sighing, "Okay, I'm gonna pretend you didn't say that."

"We are!" Peter protests, trying to convince himself. "I- I don't like like her like *that*."

Tony sighs, "The amount of 'likes' in that sentence-"

"We're just...just friends," Peter interrupts him firmly.

Tony raises an eyebrow and sets his feet apart, taking a deep breath and asking simply. "What block does she have History?"

"Sixth," Peter says without thinking.

"Uh huh, favorite color?" Tony crosses his arms.

"Black," Peter answers with a shrug.

Tony nods, "Flower?"

"Black Dahlia," Peter says, adding quickly, "like the murder."

Tony frowns slightly and then shakes his head, moving on, "Okay, favorite book?"

"The Wings of the Dove," Peter says certainty; he had seen her read that seven times at lunch.

"Do you stutter when you're around her?" Tony asks casually.

Peter makes a face and admits, "I always stutter."

"Right, because you're awkward," Tony says nonchalantly, Peter snapping his head up and giving him a look. Tony waves his hand and sighs, "But more than usual?"

"No," Peter scowls, looking away and trying not to remember the conversation that had happened earlier today when he had completely stumbled over his words.

"You're lying," Tony narrows his eyes.

"Fine," Peter curses.

Tony's smile is a triumphant one and he says, "Your stomach feel weird when she walks in or makes eye contact with you?"

"Maybe," Peter admits.

Tony shrugs, "Your chest got a little heated when you're around her?"

"It's hot in school..." Peter says weakly.

"Shut up, Pete," Tony snorts.

"You're the one asking me questions!" Peter protests in exhaustion before spluttering, "How many more of these? I feel like I'm being interrogated!"

Tony moves onto the next question, watching him carefully, "Do you like her smile?"

"Of course I like her smile- what?" Peter laughs.

"Why?" Tony narrows his eyes like he had just asked the million dollar question.

"Why?" Peter frowns, blinking as his eyes move back in forth, searching his brain for the answer. He tries to picture MJ's smile and it isn't hard. He smiles himself and says, "Uh, because...because she doesn't do it too often, it's usually sarcastic ones she throws around. But if I do make her smile it- well it starts with a low smirk and then it turns into a grin and she usually looks down because she's blushing and she'll press her lips together because she's trying not to-"

"Do you like her?" Tony interrupts, which is rude of him while Peter is thinking.

"Yeah," Peter says simply before he stops and his eyes widen. He tries to back track, "Wait-"

"I rest my case," Tony winks and clasps his hands, ruffling Peter's hair.

"That's called manipulation," Peter grumbles in defeat, jaw open in shock.

Tony sniffs and decides, "That's called knowing my kid. You'll get over it. Come on, we're going." He frowns at Peter's mop of curls on his head, "And you're brushing your hair too, it looks like a

bird's nest."

"Well you-" Peter scowls, looking at Tony's hair which is spiky and gelled as usual. He frowns and settles on, "Are mean and old."

"Oh, you got me right in the heart," Tony snickers, faking a stab to the chest and laughing.

"Shut up, there's no way I can pull this off," Peter groans, running a hand through his hair, trying to straighten his curls.

"Right because you're an awkward teenager," Tony smirks, taking down the suit and tossing it to him.

Peter scowls, "No I'm not." Yes he was.

"It's fine, because you're also Spiderman, who has taken down the city's ugliest villains and who has cheated death multiple times, and you have Tony Stark as your father. Secret weapon. You're a whole package, kid."

"But I'm not you!" Peter splutters. He wasn't an idiot. May would tisk at Tony on the TV when he was younger, calling him a ladies man. Peter couldn't even form a complete sentence around MJ sometimes.

Tony clasps his shoulder and assures him, "You're pretty much my clone, Pete. There is no one more like me than you, so there's that. Besides, you have nothing to worry about. I'm walking you through it on the car ride there, and then you'll take over and do great," he says simply.

"You're making this sound easy," Peter groans as he folds the suit and follows him out of the lab.

About thirty minutes later, they're parked outside MJ's apartment building, and Peter is staring at the alley to the side of it. His heart is beating fast and he's rubbing his mask in between his fingers. His leg is shaking, bouncing against the floor of the car and Tony pats it, sighing, "Relax."

"I am relaxed," Peter counters quickly.

Tony looks at him incredulously before nodding and suggesting helpfully, "Uh huh, well then...relax more."

"You know what, maybe I can get it tomorrow- I don't-" Peter shakes his head and attempts a smile, pointing to the open road.

"Nu uh," Tony shakes his head, putting the car in park which makes Peter's heart sink to his feet. He gulps and Tony sighs, turning in his seat and putting his arm across the back of Peter's seat, staring him in the eyes. "We're doing this. You're doing this. I explained it to you for the whole painstakingly long car ride."

"You were the one who suggested this," Peter shakes his head. "Doesn't count."

"Well I *drove you* here," Tony sniffs, grumbling.

"I could have swung with a sweatshirt and jeans over my suit but you would have said no," Peter counters with a tilt of his head.

"Uh, yeah, because it's late and you had a rough day," Tony snorts like he's being unreasonable.

"God, you're overprotective," Peter mutters.

"Shut up," Tony rolls his eyes. "You're the one freaking out about getting a backpack."

"What if someone sees me in the suit?" Peter points out, his eyes wide, nodding quickly.

"Kid, you change into that suit in an ally in broad daylight," Tony rubs a hand on the bridge of his nose. "Look, you're nervous, I get it. But she likes you. You like her. Just do what I said and you'll be fine."

"You promise?" Peter asked, taking a deep breath and clasping the handle.

Tony hesitated, and Peter looked at him incredulously. He grinned and patted him mockingly on the cheek, Peter slapping him away with a groan. "Go get em' tiger!" Tony called after him as Peter shoved himself out of the car, slipping on the mask.

"Yeah, thanks for the pep talk," the boy called, shooting a web for the building and crawling along the side until he was hid by the shadows. Luckily no one had seen him. He checks his phone and doesn't see any messages, slipping that back into his suit pocket. He makes his way along the way and mutters to himself, "Just knock, slip in when she lets you in, talk, and then get the backpack, and slip out. Tony promised it would be fine. Well...no he didn't," he realized, slowing down and cursing, "But it's gonna be."

He crawled up the wall and got to MJ's floor, about to knock on the window when he saw it was open. She suddenly walked down her hallway, crossing the door and he hissed, "MJ."

"Hold on," she said, walking by with her phone in her hand and Peter frowned at her choice of words. Tony said she would be surprised...she barely batted an eye. Peter bit his lip and slipped in, closing the window behind him before he silently made his way to the hallway. He looked down it and saw she was gone. Putting both his hands up in exasperation before letting them fall to his side he did a full circle on confusion, looking at the end of the hallway she had walked down.

Peter cursed, trying to pick a stance, crossing his arms, leaning against the wall- "No, that's stupid." But after two seconds his shuffling felt silly and he reached up to pull down his mask before he realized he had no idea what the heck was going on. Why MJ wasn't totally surprised, he had no idea, being that she had never seen him in the spider suit before, at least...not knowing it was him inside the suit.

"Where'd you go?" he finally called against his better judgement, staring forward. "MJ?"

He turned the corner when suddenly his spider senses spiked and Peter ducked with a yelp, just in time too, because a baseball bat was swung, barely skimming the top of his head.

"What the-" Peter stumbled back in shock and then had to *lunge* backward because it was swung again in an arc, slamming hard into the floor.

"GET THE HELL OUT OF MY HOUSE!" MJ yelled, swinging again, her hair whipping across her face.

Oh *crap*. Peter caught the bat this time, shouting, "MJ!" He didn't move fast enough and the girl's foot hit him right in the chest, in his bad ribs. Peter staggered back, letting out a groan of pain. He fell, ripping off his mask and scrambling back on his elbows, his feet kicking against the floor. Maybe office chair races did come in handy. He got a good distance away and shouted, "MJ! It's me! MJ!"

MJ had ripped the bat free from his grasp and raised it as she stormed forward before stopping. Just in time too, because Peter was about to web her foot to the floor. Then there was an expression

of shock, like Tony had said, but there was way too much anger in it. Peter gulped and MJ's face went red, "Peter?" she demanded, brushing her curly hair from her face. "What the heck are you doing here?"

"You said hold on in the hallway, I thought you saw me!" Peter protested, hands still up in surrender, still wary of the bat she was holding firmly over her shoulder.

"I was on the PHONE!" MJ yelled, holding up her cell that had a call ended sign on it. Peter faltered and cursed under his breath, his face going white. He had judged that wrong. Really wrong. This was bad. This was really really bad. She pressed a hand to her forehead, completely done with life it seemed, and demanded, "How the HELL did you get in here-"

"W-window-" Peter stuttered, pointing weakly, still on the ground. "It was open." His voice was higher than usual and his palms were sweating beneath the suit.

"You came through the window?" MJ demanded, gripping the bat harder with literal murder in her eyes.

Peter flinched and pointed, "Are- are you gonna hit me with that? Or could you put it down?"

MJ glared at him and lowered her arm to her side, holding out her other hand and raising her eyebrows. Peter cautiously took it and she helped him up, steadying him as he clutched his ribs. Her hand fell from his shoulder and her gaze lowered to the mask in his hand. She pointed and said quietly, "Spiderman." Then she gestured at his suit, from head to toe and looked him over, repeating in a different tone, "Spiderman."

"You gonna just...keep saying that?" Peter asked slowly, trying for a smile.

She put up a finger and narrowed her eyes, "Shut up. You broke into my house-"

"I didn't break in-" Peter protested, pointing for the window again.

"Ah," she cut him off with a sigh and threw the bat to the side, tossing her head over her shoulder. "Backpack, right?"

Peter rubbed a hand on his neck and nodded, embarrassed, shifting his feet. "Yeah...yeah."

"Phones work too, in case you didn't know," MJ says, walking backwards. "When you said you were gonna stop by I thought you meant like...a normal person. But what am I saying? You're not normal," she sighed, rolling her eyes.

Peter smiled guilty as he followed her, "I was on patrol, I just...thought it was easier and the window was-"

"Open, yeah, I know, I got that," she smiled fakely, shaking her head.

"You should really...close your window," Peter said nervously, instantly regretting his choice of words.

MJ blinked and turned, "One, do you want me to hit you with the bat? And two, name one other person who can climb six flights? I'll wait." She put her hands on her hips and faced him, Peter swallowing and looking down.

"I think I'll take the backpack now," he murmured.

"Uh huh, thought so," she smirked, walking over and grabbing the familiar looking bag that was leaning against the wall. Then she grabbed the pile of papers on the table, sliding them in between books before zipping it and passing it over. "I uh, just copied my notes for you in history. We started a new unit, and you probably don't need them, because you're...super smart. But...yeah, just in case."

Peter curled his hand around the strap she was offering to him, their fingers brushing for a second. MJ dropped her hand in embarrassment and the backpack fell against his side. He smiled and gave her a nod, "Well I should-"

"How are your ribs?" she asked nervously, rubbing her arm as she clasped it across her chest.

"Huh?" Intelligent, Peter. Good one.

"I- I kicked you, in your ribs..." she sounded slightly guilty, but there was still a glint of amusement in her eyes.

Peter bit his cheek to stop a smile and brushed a hand over them, "Nah, nah, they're fine, you just-caught me off balance, that's all."

"Alright, Spiderman," she grinned. "So what happened today? Are you okay? Asking because I know people are going to ask me because I associate with you, not out of..." she trailed off and blew hair from her face, attempting to stand casually, "concern...or anything."

Peter nodded and licked his lips, biting his cheek before realizing he probably looked stupid. "I just- panic attack- it got me off guard and I just- I'm fine, now. Just remembered some stuff that I've been trying to...not remember?"

"You don't need to go into detail," she said quickly, seeing his wince and immediately backpedaling guiltily. "I'm sorry I asked," she apologized with an embarrassed frown.

"No, you're fine. It's fine. It's you, so like..." he realized what he said and cleared his throat, attempting to recover, "Because we're friends, and I trust you, so it's- it's fine."

MJ nodded with a smirk, rocking on her heels. She gestured after a minute of silence, "Do you want to go out the front door? Or..."

"I'll-" he pointed to the back room, slinging the backpack over his shoulder. He held up the mask and grinned, "I'll use the window. I'll close it behind me, you don't need to- I'll just...show myself out I guess-" he started backing up, hitting the corner of the wall and stuttering, "I'll- I'll see you at school."

"Okay," she laughed and Peter gave her a wave, nodding awkwardly before nearly tripping over his own feet as he turned around and started walking back down the hallway, pulling the mask over his own head, cursing himself for completely blowing that encounter.

"This is a prerecorded message," Karen said the minute the fabric slipped over his face.

Peter frowned and suddenly Tony's voice hit his ears. *"Peter Benjamin Stark, don't you dare. You turn around and go get your girl."* Peter stopped in his tracks, sucking in a breath. He pulled off his mask and turned around, just as MJ came around the corner at a slow jog.

"Peter-" she stopped short once she saw that he hadn't left.

Peter looked at her and blinked, breathing hard. Then he thought, *screw it.* He surged forward,

closing the two feet of distance between them and just kissed her. It was short and then he went back on his heels, opening his eyes and waiting in shock.

MJ blinked, and he was about to apologize but then her gaze went to his lips and she moved forward, her hand landing lightly on his arm, the other moving to gently cup his cheek. They kissed, Peter shocked for a second, eyes wide before they slipped shut and he kissed back, lips pressing against hers. It was no more than three seconds before they both backed up, smiling and completely embarrassed.

MJ pursed her lips and touched them gently with a smirk, crossing her arms, "I- uh-"

"Well, I should-" Peter grinned, eyes bright as he did a little hop step towards the door.

"Yeah, you have- plus, I should...probably call back my friend and tell her that I wasn't murdered or kidnapped," she laughed lightly, biting her lip and shifting her weight from foot to foot, tucking her hair behind her ear.

"What are you gonna say?" Peter asked, heart still pounding so hard that his chest rattled. His chest was hot and his stomach turned with butterflies.

"I'll figure something out," she teased. "Anything except that Spiderman came and paid me a visit," she smiled, a shade of pink coming across her cheeks.

"Yeah, please don't...tell...anyone," he laughed, shaking his head as he backed for the room he had come out of with window.

MJ rolled her eyes, "Duh."

"And thanks," he held up the backpack as he opened the window, shoving the mask on. "For the- for the notes."

"Yeah, yeah," she brushed him off with a hand. "Anytime. Be safe?" she said nervously, walking into the room as the wind ruffled the papers, blowing her curls out of her face from where she leaned lightly against the door.

"That's not in the job description," Peter smiled beneath the mask as he climbed onto the sill and slipped out, shutting it behind him. There was a *massive* stupid grin on his face, heart racing as he practically sprinted across the wall and did a flip, shooting a web as he slid down to the ground and launched himself on top of the lamp post before lunging off. Peter swung into the street, flying past Tony's car.

Sure enough the man's voice sounded in his mask, *"I take it went well, kiddo? I see you're happy. Hey- wait- Pete- you missed your ride, genius."*

Peter kept swinging happily and he did a triple flip, his stomach spinning as he laughed out loud, "Yep. Yep. And yep. Just- I gotta swing this off- you don't want me with this much energy getting into the car-"

"Fair enough. You kiss her?"

"Yeah," Peter said, free falling before letting out a whoop as he skimmed the road with his fingers and foot, launching himself into the sky. "And! And, she kissed me back! Of course this is all *after* she thought I was a robber breaking into her house and nearly brained me with a baseball bat," he admitted.

"Oh sh-" Tony trailed off with a snort of laughter. "You recovered from that? Wow. Kudos to you, Underoos."

"Thanks," Peter grinned, "You know that's underwear, right? I looked it up."

"I've been using that nickname since I met you and you just now looked it up?"

"I thought it was something endearing," Peter grumbled.

"Sorry to disappoint?"

On another day he would have made a sarcastic comment back but right now all he could do was smile, thinking of MJ and how she had surged forward and- Peter let out a laugh, exhaling and squeezing his eyes shut. "I really like her."

"I want details when you calm down from being love struck. God, you're like cupid on steroids. Just stay in sight of the road, I'm following you best I can but you're not making it easy for me."

"Yep," Peter shouted loudly. "Since when do I make stuff easy for you? I'm a horrible son."

"Wow you finally admitted it," Tony played along with what Peter knew was a teasing tone before he admitted firmly, "I'm proud of you, Pete."

Peter landed on top of a building, breathing hard and he grinned, "Thanks. I couldn't have done this without you though."

"Yeah, you don't need to tell me that, you looked like a dang deer in headlights a couple minutes ago. You had me scared there for a bit."

Peter snorted, "Shut up." He let himself fall off the roof, webbing the side of the building as he gained momentum and swung again. "You're smiling," he inferred from Tony's tone, which made his grin widen. He knew he was without even seeing him, that's how well he could analyze the man's voice. And the thought of Tony smiling, truly smiling, made him smile as he demanded with a smirk, "Why are you smiling?"

"I haven't heard you this happy...in a while. After everything that's happened, you deserved a win. I'm just glad you got one, and I'm glad to hear that tone again. I missed it," Tony admits slowly.

Peter hoots and cackles, "Okay, Meg Ryan. Let's break out the chocolate and tissues, I think someone needs a hug."

"Hey, you asked, I answered. By the way, and this is just a side note, how much sleep have you gotten?"

Well...Tony could read his tone too. Peter was starting to lose his grasp on common sense and consciousness. Sleep deprivation was definitely taking a toll. Oh shoot, Tony asked a question. "Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes," Peter shouted happily, everything starting to spin as he twirled midair, but then realizing the spinning didn't stop when he straightened himself.

But he didn't really care, he was too in shock of this mood switch, feeling something that overrode every bad memory he had had in the last week, even if it was for a couple seconds. He felt like he had put up a thin barrier between the bad in his life and although it was rapidly dissolving, he was given this time to actually take a deep breath without a tight chest, to admit he was happy without having something knock him out of the sky, to have his heart pound for good reasons, not bad, to

have a smile on his face that wasn't forced and just a mask to hide what had happened. It was a jarring shift that shocked him to his core. He hadn't felt like this in forever, and it nearly brought tears of relief to Peter's eyes. Yeah, his arms started tingling from the effort it took to swing, but that was because he was getting...really...tired. However, he still had some energy left and he blinked, "Why?"

"Yeah, okay Mr. Seasons of Love. I'm gonna go with twenty minutes of sleep tops. And how much coffee?"

Peter giggled happily, nicely skimming the top of a car and avoiding a lamp post just barely as he sighed dramatically, counting how many cups he had had on one hand and trying to switch to the next, nearly letting go of his web, "A lot, when you weren't looking. Why?" His voice sounded different. He probably needed sleep.

As if reading his mind, Tony sighs, *"You need to go to bed. Stop swinging before you fall and kill yourself. I think this was the last thing on Peter's to do list today. You're done."*

It was like Tony's words flipped a switch in his brain and Peter's swing slowed. He nodded sleepily, yawning beneath the mask and letting out a groan. "You're right." Peter's eyes suddenly felt heavy, his energy draining away at an alarming rate that sent a red flag to the last bit of sense he had control over. He cut a corner as he lowered himself. Peter landed and stumbled back against the nearest wall, pressing both hands to his head and sinking to the ground, letting out a massive sigh, "Okay, energy rush is over, big crash. Come pick me up."

"I'm four blocks away- you went too fast and cut corners I can't, give me a bit."

Peter slumped further against the wall, closing his eyes and muttering happily, "Yeah, okay, I'll be right there. Or right here. Whatever the expression is."

"God, if you weren't so innocent, I'd ask if you were drunk, but you probably haven't had a sip of anything remotely-"

"I drank a ginger ale at a party once," Peter protested angrily.

"That...has no alcohol in it what so ever," Tony laughed.

"Well, I'm just tired," Peter frowned, knowing that line had no relevance in their conversation but he just wanted to state the fact. Peter crossed his arms as he sighed, leaning back against the wall. He chewed on his lip before he pointed out, "You know, they warn us about the effects of sleep deprivation in health class. But I didn't think it would be this bad? This hasn't happened before."

"You've been through a lot, kid. I'm surprised this didn't happen sooner. I've been waiting for you to crash."

Peter thought about that. Then there was a moment of clarity and he scratched his chin, "I think- you know what? I think I know what it is. I think I now why I crashed *now* and not before." Peter licked his lips, still not opening his eyes as he said firmly, "Because I couldn't. Not yet. But now I can."

"Well that clears it up," Tony laughed sarcastically. *"Thanks, kid."*

Peter nodded as he attempted to explain, "It's because something really good happened. That doesn't happen a lot, not to me. I mean, the day you *officially* became my father," he spread his hands and said, "that was a good thing, but remember? Remember? I shut down then too," he realizes, recalling the night on the roof when something had actually gone his way and he had

bolted, too afraid to screw it up.

"Yeah, kid," Tony said quietly, and Peter could hear the emotion coating his voice.

"So," he nodded sleepily, sticking a finger in the air. "I'm sensing a pattern here. And my hypothesis is that when something goes right, I shut down now. So I'm shutting down."

If Peter had been awake and alert, he would have heard the pause that said and meant everything. The pain that Tony felt when he thought about how Peter couldn't be happy. The emotion in the silence of how lucky he was to have the kid, but how he hated the fact that he had these rare moments of bliss when in reality it should be the other way around.

The man laughed, once again using humor as he teased, *"Your hypothesis wasn't an if and then statement."*

Peter groaned and slapped a hand against his forehead, "Oh no-"

"Kid- I was- I was kidding," Tony snorted.

"And do you want to know why I'm shutting down?" Peter asked, continuing on before his brain even caught up. Oh God, he was going there. He couldn't exactly tell his mouth to stop forming words, now could he? Every barrier he had put up to keep stuff to himself, stuff he knew he should tell Tony but never could, shattered in that instant. Peter felt tears in his eyes as he mumbled out, "Because when something is so good, I'm afraid I'll lose it. Like my parents, like May and Ben...like you. And I thought I did lose you. But I got you back, so that's good, but I still shut down on the roof. And then now MJ, and then just-" he let his hand fall in a curve to the ground. "It's like dominoes. Which we should totally play when we get home. Or maybe tomorrow. I'm tired."

"Dominoes it is, Pete," Tony said quietly.

"But- I'm-" he chokes on a laugh. "I'm happy."

Peter breaths a sigh, making a face, frowning, even. Saying that sentence felt wrong given everything he had been through. He couldn't afford to be happy, he always had to look over his shoulder, he hadn't gotten a break. He felt like he did on the roof with Tony, afraid to actually accept the fact that something good at happened because good things never happened to him.

He wrung his hands and continued, "And it's weird. I feel like I shouldn't be. But I am. And I've missed being happy. The last time I was happy was before Goblin, and I haven't gotten a break since then and neither have you. So- so I'm scared, because I don't-" Peter presses his lips together trying to get out what he wanted to say but couldn't. I'm scared to lose you again, I don't want to lose you again, I can't lose you again.

"And then, you-" He closes his eyes and whispers the sentence that is as close as he can get, "Nothing's gonna happen right?"

A car suddenly pulls up in front of him and Peter's eyes shoot open as the headlights shut down, making him blink, and the low rumble cease. Tony gets out, turning off his ear piece, so that Peter instead can hear his real voice as he shuts the door behind him and promises, "No, kid. Nothing. It's over." Peter breaths a sigh of relief, a blatant sign of the trust between them and he feels a tear slip down his cheek, moving with the dimples on his face from the sad smile that's forming.

"Well that's good." He sighed, closing his eyes as he leaned against the wall before he started to slide down towards the pavement.

"Nope, nope," Tony closed the distance and reached for him before he could fall to the side before hauling him upright, hands under his arms. Peter weakly tried to stand as Tony lifted him and looped his arm over his shoulder and back, starting towards the car.

"MJ kissed me," Peter grinned, leaning heavily against Tony.

Tony laughed and nodded as he looked at him sideways, slipping the backpack off the boy and slinging it across his arm, "Yeah, I know."

Peter patted his arm and said honestly, "Thanks for coming and getting me."

"I was-" Tony looks down the street in confusion and shakes his head as he chuckles, "I was following you, kid."

"Right. But also, just always," Peter said casually before he set his eyebrows and sobered his tone, looking at him nervously. "You always come back. You always will, right?" he asked, reaching and grabbing a fist full of his shirt as Tony eased him into the passenger seat. Peter yanked off his mask with his free hand, locking eyes with him, pleading.

Tony smiled and ruffled his curls, promising, "Yeah, Pete. Always."

Peter nodded and uncurled his hand, and Tony circled the car, slipping into the driver's seat. Peter's head lolled against the leather and Tony rolled his eyes, "Kid, I swear, if I didn't know better, I'd think you were drunk."

"Studies show that being sleep deprived has the same symptoms as drinking too much. UCLA did one about the effects on the neurons in the temporal lobe. Really cool stuff," Peter murmured, rubbing his eyes.

Tony turns to him and blinks as he pulls the seat belt over the kid's chest and exclaims, "God, you really are my son."

"What?" Peter asks sleepily, his eyelids fluttering shut. Shadows dance over the boy's face as Tony starts up the car, the lights glaring in the darkened front seats.

"Nothing," Tony smiles as he puts the car in drive and presses lightly on the gas.

Peter shifts, turning towards him and announcing, "I'll try and talk to you more. Okay? I should. I don't know why I keep it to myself, I'm sorry."

"It's okay, kid, I get it," Tony assures him, Peter's shoulders easing. "I bet if you weren't all juiced up on no sleep you'd say differently."

"No, I mean it, quote me." Peter seems serious, his eyes fierce, his nodding firm.

Tony smiles and agrees lightly, "Alright, whatever you say. Just get some sleep," he insisted. He could see the bags, the tint of grey surrounding the boy's eyes, a clear sign he needed sleep, now.

"Tony?" Peter says firmly as he leans against the seat, starting to close his eyes. It was as if he had one final thing to get out.

Tony looks over and takes a breath, asking, "Yeah?"

"I'd die for you," Peter says quietly, and then he falls asleep almost instantly.

That being said, he sounded completely awake when he said that, and the amount of depth that

slammed into Tony through that sentence had him pressing on the break, concerned he might floor it in shock. There was a tidal wave of memories behind that simple statement, beginning from the first time he knelt at his side on the tarmac, to holding him when he was bleeding out through the stomach, to standing at his bedside saying goodbye like a coward, to stupidly walking out of the lab, leaving a devastated teenager behind him, to getting shoved into that room by Damian and everything that that entailed, to holding him as he collapsed when May died, to letting him fall into his arms on the roof- to Toomes- to him getting sick in the lab- to him diving to his knees at school...to now.

It was crazy to think it was even one life, and yet it all seemed so long ago and so short at the same time.

Tony swallows and looks over at the teenager as he stops at a red light, the light shade tinting his face, brown curls over his eyes. Peter was breathing deeply, exhausted, and Tony just stared at him with mixed emotions. He knew Peter would always say that, no matter what Tony did. Before, that made him want to run as far away from the kid as he could, now he never wanted to live his side.

He knew what those words meant. A substitute for three words they had never said flat out, but always meant, finding new ways to say it. Tony stared ahead of him in shock at the range of emotions that years ago, before he met Peter, he thought he would never feel. But now, he had Pepper, he had Peter, he had Steve and Rhodey, he had the team...Tony realized that this was about as close to perfect as anything could ever be.

The kid next to him was perfect and that was his son. And he was happy. Tony was happy, for once in his life- he had to grip the steering wheel tightly as a tear trickled down his cheek. He smiled, laughing a little bit as he eased on the gas, wishing this car ride would stretch out for eternity because his chest wasn't tight and his healing wounds weren't hurting, his hands weren't shaking and he didn't have a sudden urge to look over his shoulder. Maybe this is how Peter felt a second ago.

The car was softly lit and warm, Peter asleep in the passengers seat, Tony in the driver's, moving smoothly along the road. His eyes were glossy and filled with happiness. That's not to say there wasn't regret, because there was: the stabbing guilt in his chest that he had ever thought it was a good thing to leave behind the one person that mattered most, the person that he would be nothing without.

Tony taps the wheel nervously, clearing his throat as quietly as he can before he keeps his eyes straight ahead but begins to speak in a hushed tone, "Pete- I-" he smiles as he looks over at the sleeping teenager, licking his lips and chewing on his lip, rubbing a hand over his face.

God, just say it.

"I love you."

Silence.

Tony lets out a sigh of relief, feeling like he had just let off a lifetime's load of weight from his shoulders.

"I love you too."

The man's head snapped over faster than it had in his entire life with wide eyes. Peter didn't even open his, he just yawned and said, "I'm not unconscious this time you coward."

Tony nearly laughed in happiness and he shook his head in disbelief, muttering, "You obnoxious little-"

"What was that?" Peter opened one eye with a tired smile and Tony reached over, rubbing his bangs down over his face. The boy shoved him away weakly, chin nodding off to his chest.

"Go to sleep," Tony scoffs, straightening the wheel as he heads down the road. He doesn't say anything else for the rest of the car ride, he just turns on some music and keeps it at a low volume, not that it would matter; Peter was sound asleep. Of course *now* he was. He picked that one time to be half awake. Of course he did. Peter knew him better than anyone did.

They finally get home and Peter doesn't show any signs of him waking up so Tony shuts off the car with a smile on his face and gets out, looping around and easing Peter out slowly, arm around his back as the kid leans against him, standing slightly in his sleep. Tony shuts the door and helps Peter up the elevator, somehow making it all the way back to the boy's room before shoving the covers aside on his bed and setting him down, unraveling the teen's arm from his neck. He grabs the mask that Peter drops as his fingers unclasp and he sets it on the nearest chair, pulling the covers over him.

Tony smiles at him, and then crosses the room, shutting the door after turning off the light.

Peter blinks and groans as a pillow hits him in the face, instantly waking him up. He raises himself on his elbows and looks to the right, seeing Tony in the chair by the desk, launching another pillow at him. Peter catches that one and flings it back, hitting the man in the chest. "Five more minutes," Peter grumbles, turning over and bringing the covers over his head.

"You're gonna be late," Tony tisks, getting up from the chair- Peter can hear the creak, and walking over.

"Late to what?" Peter smirks beneath the covers, hearing his dad stop at the side of the bed.

"A dentist appointment," Tony drawls sarcastically, trying to yank the comforter from Peter's fists.

"Screw my dentist appointment," Peter laughs, grasping for it and curling up so Tony can't pull it away without dragging him with it.

"You're graduating today, Peter," Tony says with a sigh, like he didn't already know it. "Get your butt out of bed."

Peter peeks out from the sheet and narrows his eyes, "Make me, old man."

Tony raises an eyebrow and Peter starts laughing as Tony grabs the comforter and pulls, sending Peter to the floor in a pile of blankets. He sighs and gets to his feet, shoving Tony who snickers and goes back to the chair at the desk. Peter stretches and yawns, rubbing his eye as he goes over and yanks his sweatshirt off, tossing it into his hamper.

"What's this?" Tony asks, Peter turning and seeing Tony holding up one of the advancements he was making on his web shooters.

Peter snatches it back and sets it down on the desk, "Don't touch my stuff. I'm trying to make my release spring more coiled. Put it- put it down."

"Good lord, you need to control your OCD." Tony spins in the chair.

"You could break it!" Peter protests, moving it to the side and blocking his tech by leaning against the desk.

Tony bits his cheek and nods, "I see how it is. Not like I'm Iron Man or anything, or got into MIT at 15-"

Peter tosses his head back with a sigh, "And graduated summa cum laude, I swear to God, say that one more time and I will punch you. And I have before. Many times. So you know I'm not kidding. And news flash, you being a genius doesn't give you an excuse to touch my stuff."

"Okay, well, I'm your father. So that's got to give me brownie points," Tony countered. Peter rolls his eyes and the man winks as he gets to his feet and announces, "The team will be there but they'll be in the back, Pepper and I have our seats reserved though. We're getting there in 40 minutes, with or without you."

"You'll leave without me?" Peter snickers in amusement. "It's my graduation."

"There's good food at graduations, I'd go without you," Tony shrugs. Peter smiles at that; over the past couple years, the amount of times he had to give Tony looks for not eating had dropped tremendously. The impact of that sentence went deeper than the surface. Tony didn't see his smile because he was walking past him and opening his closet, pulling out his suit and laying it over his chair, pointing at it and then at the door which he starts towards. "Okay, change. I let you sleep in and this is the thanks I get. Next time, you're on your own, set an alarm. I'm gonna go get into my suit because apparently I have to dress nice for this or something-"

"Don't even with me, I'm surprised you're not already in a suit. You've got to have one that you sleep in in your massive closet," Peter teases, grabbing his phone from where it was plugged in on the floor, scrolling through some messages.

"Shut up. How's MJ?" Tony grins, wiggling his eyebrows once he recognizes the look from Peter's face that his girlfriend had texted him.

Peter rolls his eyes and admits, "She's one of the students who will be on stage when I get my diploma, so she's considering tripping me as I walk by her."

"Typical MJ," Tony snickers, drumming his fingers on the doorway. Over the past couple years he had gotten to know her better, and she had been over at the compound often, her and Pepper getting close as well. He snaps and points at the suit again as he leans halfway out the door, "Okay. Change. If we're not downstairs in ten minutes, Pepper will kill me, and then you." That was serious; Pepper would kill them if they made her late, and if it was Tony's fault she would probably murder her husband.

"I'm already dead inside," Peter pouts his lower lip.

Tony makes a face and mumbles, "That's my line. How'd you sleep?"

"Good," Peter says truthfully, nodding. He hadn't had nightmares in a while, and he remembers going to bed at one last night, and now it was eight, so that was a good seven hours- a number that a couple years ago, seemed impossible.

"Good," Tony says in relief, before he pats the door and walks down the hallway.

Peter texts back MJ and Ned, laughing as he webs his door shut and gets into his suit. He slips on the pants and the buttoned up shirt, ducking towards the mirror and trying to mess with his hair a little bit so it didn't look as much like a bed head. He pulls on some charcoal covered socks and

clumsily slips his black shoes on, before his gaze falls on his spider suit that's hanging over the other chair. Peter bites his lip before he takes everything off, puts on the suit, and then gets dressed again.

He holds his phone in one hand, scrolling through Decathlon group chat messages as he moves the tie through his hand, threading it to a certain length before he twists his fingers, flipping the tie around his hand and dragging it forward with his pointer finger.

He lets the loop he made fall around his head before he grabs the front and moves it towards his neck, straightening it as much as he can.

There's a knock on the door and Tony comes in, looking at him proudly as he gestures, "Nice tie, kiddo."

"Thanks, how'd I do?" Peter puts his arms out, admiring his work. Tony had taught him that trick a while ago, and since then, Peter hadn't had a bad memory with a tie.

"Outstanding," Tony grins, reaching and straightening it a slight bit more out of instinct before folding Peter's collar over it.

Peter makes sure Tony's done before he points at the door and grins, "Thanks for just bursting in."

Tony looks at the open door and shrugs, "I respected your privacy by knocking and then demonstrated my right as your father by just coming in without asking."

"Uh huh, yeah I think you've used that 'father' card to it's max," Peter snickered, grabbing his cap and gown and motioning for the door. "We're at one minute, I suggest we get downstairs."

Tony curses as he pushes past Peter who sprints to follow him, stopping by the door and waving Tony forward, running back to get his phone in his room before stopping by his desk. He smiles sadly and lifts the picture of May that he keeps there and presses his lips against it, taking a deep breath. "I'm graduating today, May. I-" he looks down, shifting his stance as his voice breaks and he admits, "I wish- I wish you could be here. I'm gonna make you proud, okay? I promise."

He sets the picture back down, straightens his suit, closes his eyes, and starts for the door.

The next couple hours go by very fast. Peter has breakfast with Tony and Pepper, they drive to the school with his crowded with families. The graduation is in their massive football stadium, as many chairs set on the lawn as possible. There's a lifted platform at the front, and Peter must split from his family to take his seat in the row of valedictorians. Tony gave him a nod and squeeze of his shoulder, Pepper a hug, and then they went to get to their seat.

Peter takes his seat next to Flash who gives him a nudge, "You nervous, Stark?"

Peter blushed at the use of his last name and he takes a breath, rubbing his knees with his palms, admitting, "A little. You?"

Flash cranes his neck to look behind him and says, "This is the first time my mother and father have showed up to something so...yeah." Peter gives him a nod and the boy asks, "Is Tony here?" Peter nods again and Flash smirks, "Cool."

Morita somehow gets everyone's attention, his voice carrying through the mic that is connected to the surrounding speakers. Peter tugs on his gown slightly, wringing his hands, the cool breeze

ruffling his curls. This was crazy. How was this happening?

The ceremony started, and MJ took her seat down the front row from him, giving him a wink. He smiled back, raising his eyebrows at Ned who was a couple seats away from the both of them. The three grinned at each other.

"The Avengers back there?" Flash whispers as one of the speakers addresses the crowd.

"Yeah, probably in sunglasses and a baseball cap because they think it makes them invisible," Peter says back with a smirk, getting a chuckle out of his old enemy.

Speeches from the administration was made, and the ceremony continued. Peter was called and bragged about as he took his spot on the side of the stage and did his part in reading off the names of his classmates. He handed many of them their diplomas before returning to his seat, giving Ned a fist bump as he passed, MJ kicking him in the shin. He took his seat again as they narrowed down on the Q-V's, and his heart pounded for his turn.

MJ's voice kept him calm, announcing names as they neared his, and Peter felt his nervousness dissolve into excitement. He was graduating. Tony was here. Pepper was here. His friends and family were here.

"Peter Stark," MJ finally said with a smile, locking eyes with him.

Taking a breath, Peter stood as applause erupted behind him, a loud whistle breaking through it all that Peter knew was Tony. He grinned and jogged up the steps, extremely elated, feeling his first step on that stage resonate to his bones. MJ's eyes were gleaming with happiness as she handed him his diploma. He smiled and took her wrist, pulling her forward and kissing her on the lips, MJ reaching and holding onto her cap as she laughed against the kiss, leaning backward.

They straightened, whooping and whistling roaring from the crowd and Peter let out a happy laugh and took his diploma, stuttering out sincere gratitude, sobering his expression as he shook his principal's hand. Peter turned and faced the audience, the sun streaming over the top of the stadium.

Pepper was clapping, tears streaming down her face, her wedding ring gleaming in the sun. Happy and the Avengers were in the back in sunglasses and baseball caps, like that somehow made them invisible, which maybe it did, because no one had noticed yet. They all had smiles on their faces as they clapped, waving at Peter. Ned was screaming loudly, jumping in his seat and pumping his fist and Peter grinned at his enthusiasm. Flash was clapping and he gave Peter a respectful nod, Peter returning it.

But his gaze found Tony and then it never left until he walked off the stage, tears glistening in his eyes, smiling wider than he ever had.

"I'm so proud of you!" Pepper gave him a hug when he was allowed to loop around to the back of the school. Peter grinned, returning the hug, Pepper kissing him lightly on the cheek. The Avengers were there and they each gave Peter hugs, telling them how proud they were, how big of a day this was, and congratulations.

MJ and Ned ran toward him and his friend tackled him in a hug, "Oh my God we graduated! This is crazy, we're adults now, we're done with high school I don't even know how to feel, you know? I'm happy, and sad at the same time but I can't decide on one-"

"I can," MJ shoved past him with a smile, smirking at Peter.

He grinned, "You didn't trip me."

"I was kind of busy, some lunatic kissed me in front of all those people," she said, giving him a tight hug before pulling backwards a bit. Peter cupped her cheek as he brushed her bangs aside with a smile and they kissed, Ned fake throwing up beside them.

"Alright guys, get a room," he groaned, playfully breaking them apart. MJ gave Pepper a hug and Ned went to say hi to all the Avengers, something he always loved doing. Peter looked around for Tony, who he saw was a couple feet away and the man tossed his head over his shoulder. Peter excused himself and jogged forward, Tony clasping his arm around him.

"How do you feel?" the man asked nervously.

"Crazy. Different, but the same. I'm excited," he admitted breathlessly. "You gave me a weird look up there," Peter smiled sideways at him. "What did it mean? For once I couldn't read it."

Tony looked down with a small smirk and he tightened his grip on Peter's shoulder, "I have a lot of mixed emotions. And if I went through every single one, it would turn into a chick flick and you know how I'm not a fan of those." Peter snickers and nods in understanding. Although they told each other everything nowadays, Peter understood some things couldn't be explained. From that day forward he would remember the complexity and depth in Tony's gaze, and it would remain one of the best moments of his life. Tony looks over at him and ruffles his hair, "You're...you're not the same sixteen year old I recruited from Queens, kid. You're grown up."

"I know, isn't it cool?" Peter drawled, rolling his eyes.

"Yes, yes it is," Tony agreed. "But it's also not. I don't like it. I want to hit the repeat button, minus a couple instances," he adds, sharing a bit of dark humor with Peter. Over the past couple years they didn't really talk about Damian and Toomes that often. On occasion it would come up, either from a nightmare which was periodically had, or just because it fit the conversation. But they didn't dwell on it too much.

"But you're graduating and...I'm so proud of you, Pete," Tony said quietly, clasping the side of his cheek with a grin before blinking and ruffling his hair, crossing his arms. "You're already doing amazing things, and you will continue to. You are my favorite young adult."

"Thanks," Peter blushed at the compliment, looking down at the ground.

"And I couldn't be more proud to have you as my kid," Tony added, looking straight ahead, taking off his sunglasses as the sun ducked behind the school, trees rustling around them as Peter glanced up. "I don't deserve you, Pete. Never have."

Peter rolled his eyes and shook his head, "That's the dumbest thing-"

"I made you grow up too fast," Tony says simply. "I know we don't bring it up as much, but I still remember it every day." The day he walked out. Peter did too. It didn't hurt as much, but he still remembered every second.

"On that stage you...Peter that was possibly the happiest I've ever been. You want to know why? Because after everything I've put you through, you still looked at me like I was the best person in the world, like you were thanking me, but kid...it's all you. I just- I just wanted you to know that. Years ago after that ferry incident I told you that I wanted you to be better than me. Well you are. You always have been. And you better not slack off because you always will be," he gave him a

look, tears threatening to spill down Peter's cheeks. "You deserved to have a normal life, to be a normal teenager, even if that meant just being Spiderman but instead you came into my life. And...I can't thank you enough for that."

Peter swallowed the lump in his throat and tried to clear it, rocking on his heels as he and Tony broke eye contact and looked separate directions. "How long you'd rehearse that?"

"Six hours in front of a mirror," Tony admitted with a chuckle, not missing a beat at their synchronized humor.

"Tony, can I ask you something?" he said slowly.

"Yeah, Pete, shoot," Tony nodded, putting his hands in his pockets and turning towards him.

"When we were heading back to my apartment after Germany, did you hug me or were you opening the door?" Peter asked with a growing smile.

Tony chuckles and shook his head, "Shut up-"

"No one opens a door like that," Peter protested.

"You'll never know," Tony teased, clasping his shoulder and back of his head as he pulled him forward, wrapping his arms around him. Peter returned the hug and closed his eyes, resting his chin on Tony's shoulder. The man carded a hand through the curls on the back of his head and tightened his grip, Peter curling his hands into fists in Tony's jacket. "I'm so proud of you, kiddo."

"You've mentioned that," Peter said sarcastically into Tony's shoulder.

"May would be too," Tony whispered and Peter bit his lip, tears coming to his eyes as he nodded. Tony rubbed his back and then pulled away, subtly wiping his eyes and ruffling Peter's hair as they straightened their jackets and looked around to make sure no one had seen their display of affection.

Tony kicked his shoe as he started back to the crowd, "You're one of the few people that can make me cry."

Peter laughed, "You're welcome."

"No," Tony shook his head. "I don't appreciate it. You made me soft. You know what, I don't like you. I take back everything I said. I'm giving Stark Industries to DUM-E, he'll do fine. I'll turn your room into another office or something. Maybe put in a disco ball?"

"You do that," Peter snickers, shaking his head and bumping Tony slightly.

They walked back to their family and friends side by side, exchanging looks. They've never looked at each other this way before. So much of the past was evident in their gazes. Bridges that had once been broken now strengthening as their gazes locked. Bad memories forgotten and replaced with love that revealed to them the real underlying reason they had had that argument in the first place so long ago. The sheet of bulletproof glass that was solidified by years of protectiveness and love had never been stronger. It had cracked, it had shattered, but it would never be truly broken.

That was as simple as it was, as it always had been, even if a million things had tried to cover it up.

"So...lab when we get home?"

"Sure thing, kid."

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys <3 <3 Ive always wanted to do a graduation one so i did it XD and i thought that would be a fitting end :)

I really hope you liked it, thank you seriously THANK YOU GUYS this has been one of my fav fics ever to write and it is just insane how much support it got i cannot express my thanks enough but know it means the world and i rly rly appreciate it! I will miss this so muchhhhhhh ugh it was rly sad to finish this but also really cool :))))))

Please please please let me know what you thought, I love all of your comments they are amazingggggg

ANYWAY this was a bittersweet chapter to write haha between the office chair races and Peters sleep deprived humor teehee i can relate. He and tony FINALLY said i love you so thats just sweet

UGH I LOVE THEM. I will forever stan iron dad and there are more stories to come so please stay tuned!!! <3

Theres smmmm i want to say but i think tony wouldnt approve if i dove into a chick flick XD

So Ill call this a wrap, thank you guys sm for everything, I hope you liked the last chapter, thank you for sticking with this, stay healthy, stay tuned, believe in urself because every single one of you is amazing and anyone who says otherwise is wrong :) g :)

And as always

I love you 3000 <3 <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!